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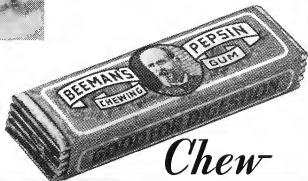


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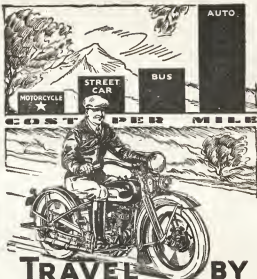
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# Drums of Destiny

A STIRRING ADVENTURE LOVE  
NOVEL OF COLORFUL HAITI

By  
J. GIBSON TAYLOR, Jr.

*Frontispiece by*  
STEPHEN WAITE



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*Gregory sprang to his feet, reaching automatically for the pistol at his hip. His sudden move arrested the men. Gabelus checked himself and shifted his gaze uncertainly from the white woman to this new and unfamiliar protector. (Page 20.)*

# DRUMS OF DESTINY

## CHAPTER ONE

### TWO WOMEN



REGORY MARSHALL drew rein as he came to an open spot on the side of the hill.

There was a pleasing lithe-ness in his tall, slim figure as he sat his horse negligently, and his lean cheeks and his jaw had a decided firmness about them. His hair, which was the color the French call *chatain*, and his nose were un-noteworthy features, but there was a kindness around his mouth that people remembered, and his dark eyes were bright and friendly as he looked down at his plantation in the valley below him.

Far to the west lay the coastal town of Cap-Haitien hidden from his sight by the steep blue mountains that were crowned by the frowning bastions of Christophe's citadelle. Nearer, to the east, was the small village of Dondon, its whitewashed walls and straw-thatched roofs standing out against the green back-ground of the foothills.

Directly below him, Gregory could see his own house set in its cool grove of royal palms, whose fronds whispered in the slightest breeze. Then, to all sides of the house, the landscape was eclipsed by the forest of trees in whose shade Gregory's coffee bushes were planted.

Mile after mile this monstrous green canopy stretched through the valley and up the sides of the hills; Habitation Marshall it was called, a model coffee plantation on the island of Haiti.

Gregory turned to his overseer, a short placid looking Negro, who had stopped his horse a few paces to the rear. "Olivier," he said, "this afternoon I want you to start the men to work clearing for the harvest."

"Oui, Monsieur," said Olivier.

The words he had spoken filled Gregory with a sense of well-being. It was as though he had said to Olivier: "Prepare for my success." For it meant that to him. A little over four months ago Gregory landed in Haiti possessing nothing in the world save this plantation, which had been allowed to fall into ruin.

He borrowed a small sum of money with which to pay his laborers while he endeavored to whip the plantation into the fine shape it had now reached. It had been hard work, and he had spent many sleepless nights, but now he was preparing to reap the benefits of his labors.

In a way, he mused as he started his horse down the hill towards his house, in a way Lilian's apparent disloyalty had been a Godsend. Had she married him and stayed in New York instead of running away to Jamaica when he lost

his small fortune in the crash, they might now be living together in an airless apartment while he spent the day clerking in an equally airless office downtown. Surely, Gregory said to himself, he was better off here, the owner of a successful coffee plantation and master of his own desires.

Yet, though he tried, he was not able to convince himself that this was entirely true. Lilian de Wolfe had promised to marry him; they had been engaged for four months when the bottom dropped out of the market. And when Gregory lost his money, he lost Lilian. It was all very simple, he told himself. But unfortunately, it was not quite as simple as that; he had been hurt more than he would admit even to himself.

Gregory and Olivier arrived at the house. There, on the wide tiled veranda, two chairs were drawn up before a table that was littered with papers. The two men seated themselves, and from a packet of ancient documents yellowed with age, Gregory selected a map. It was a plan of the Habitation Marshall, showing the location of the old French houses and slave quarters.

The sight of that package of parchment-hued documents brought vividly back to Gregory's mind the last interview he had had with Lilian in New York. The handful of papers constituted Gregory's title to the plantation, and on that fateful day when his business had failed, he had taken the small bundle of yellowed deeds to Lilian's apartment on Fifth Avenue. Even today Gregory was not sure what had happened to one of those very documents: the French survey notes.

Because he could not read French, he had asked Lilian to translate to him the contents of the titles. When she had finished, he told her of his plan to restore order to the plantation and make of it a profitable enterprise.

He remembered how she had looked as she sat opposite him, the black velvet of her gown setting off her white skin and golden hair. What a strange light had come into her blue eyes when he

asked her to become his wife, to accompany him to Haiti and help him in his work.

"I can't, Greg," she had said.

"Why not, Lilian? Don't you love me?"

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about. You need a woman now who knows how to do things, Greg, to take care of you, to look after your house. I—I—" she looked around the beautifully furnished room helplessly. "I don't know how to do a thing."

"Nonsense—" he began.

"No." She rose and paced up and down the room. "I can't do it. Anyway, if you're broke, just how do you expect to pay our way to Haiti?"

"Lilian, I'm not going to beat around the bush. We're facing a desperate situation, and this is the only opportunity I have left." He paused for a moment, then continued. "The bracelet I gave you for an engagement present is very valuable. Converted into cash, it would give us all we need to start on."

A frightened look appeared in her eyes as she listened to him. "But Greg," she said quietly. "You won't ask me to give back the bracelet?"

"I'm not asking anything, Lilian. I'd hoped you'd want to."

"I can't, Greg. Don't ask me to." Her voice was strained. "I can't give it up." She came over and sat down again. "Greg," she continued after a pause, "I'm afraid it won't work. Our marriage, I mean, and the plantation. I'm not made for that sort of life."

"But Lilian, I swear you'd love it—"

"I might if I loved you enough, Greg—but I don't."

"Lilian, you don't mean that! You're upset. I'll go now and come back for you at dinner time."

"No," said Lilian, "don't come back. I'm having dinner with Dick Sayre."

"Sayre!" Gregory repeated, cut to the quick. "But tonight, Lilian, of all nights. When I need you—and with that boulder, Sayre!"

Lilian was suddenly flaming. "Don't call him that," she said savagely. "I won't allow it. Dick's a friend of mine."



And that was the last glimpse Gregory had had of Lilian. He had called her house repeatedly, but the maid had always said she was out. Then, abruptly, she had left New York and gone to Kingston, Jamaica.

Gregory did not discover that the old French survey was missing until after her departure. Lilian was the only person besides himself who had seen the papers. Yet why should she take the survey? She was certainly not interested in the prospect of going to Haiti.

Furthermore, as the French survey was not an important document in the chain of titles, Gregory could not remember whether Lilian had even bothered to translate it to him. Aside from the fact that it was a description of the measurement of his land undertaken a hundred years ago, he had no idea of what was contained in the paper.

These thoughts flashed through his mind as he talked with Olivier on the porch of his house. He pushed them aside brusquely and gave his attention to the work at hand.

About a mile from the present house, on a slight rise in the land, were the ruins of the original French mansion built in the time of Louis XV, long before the slave revolt had sent the white owners fleeing from the island.

Talking with Olivier, Gregory planned the reconstruction of the old mansion. Its roofs and floors would be restored, its gardens cleared and planted with the exotic flowers that had once bloomed there. Men were already working on it; the expense was small, and the delight of planning the interior occupied his lonely evenings.

With an impatient gesture that set Olivier to wondering, he rose from his chair and began pacing up and down the veranda. Lilian! He thought bitterly to himself. How could he imagine she would ever consent to come to this wild spot?

Gregory returned to the table and finished giving his instruction to Olivier. "I'm going over to O'Shea's for lunch," he added, "and I'll be back late."

To the east, on the other side of the little town of Dondon, lived Adam O'Shea and his daughter, Kathryn. They were the only other white people in the vicinity. Habitation O'Shea joined Gregory's property actually, but as the two houses were built at different ends of the two plantations, it was only occasionally that Gregory found time to visit the other Americans.

Gregory left his plantation road and came out onto the main route. Here, directly opposite Habitation Marshall, was the plantation of a native, Samuel Legrand, who, when he was not occupied with his holdings, was also Mayor of Dondon.

Gregory gave little thought to this handsome mulatto, for he only met him occasionally, and at these times he found something in the native's bearing that he instinctively distrusted.

At intervals a little brook crossed Gregory's path, and here and there, gleaming with a pale mauve fire through the twilight of the groves, an orchid bloomed. The heavy odor of yellow jasmine hung like incense in the valley, while on higher land the springlike fragrance of campeche trees in full bloom was carried on the morning air. To the north and south rose great blue hills, and over all the round yellow sun smiled.

After a half-hour's steady riding, Gregory arrived at the O'Shea home, set in its old gardens. Kathryn, having heard his horse's hoofs, was waiting on the veranda. She had apparently just come home, for she was wearing a white riding habit and a saucy little straw hat from under the brim of which Gregory caught the gleam of her deep blue eyes. Disturbing eyes, they were, and he looked away quickly. He did not want to be disturbed.

Her hair was dark; her skin, fair as a magnolia blossom, was made more fair by the flash of scarlet that was her mouth. As Gregory dismounted her eyes rested for a moment on his face. In that second an astute observer might have seen a mingling of sudden happiness and yearning cross her face, fleeting like the ripples

on the surface of a pool. Only for a moment, however, for she quickly recovered her self-possession and smiled at Gregory. She descended the steps of the veranda and came to meet him, a white figure, gloriously young and slim in the morning sunlight.

"Hello, stranger," she called gayly. "You've certainly been keeping yourself in hiding."

"I've been busy, Kathryn," said Gregory. "It's not that I haven't wanted to come over."

"Of course," said Kathryn sympathetically. "I understand. I haven't lived here all my life without knowing what the coffee season's like."

She took his arm familiarly and chatting gaily, allowed him to lead her back to the veranda. Adam O'Shea came out to meet them. He was a tall, muscular man; his bronzed face heightened the silvery whiteness of his hair, and he radiated an air of health and cordiality.

"Hello, Gregory," he said, holding out his hand. "It must be a month since you've been to see us."

"You make me feel very guilty," said Gregory.

"You are guilty," said Kathryn smiling, "and that's all there is to it. Let's have a drink before lunch," she added, leading the way to the end of the veranda. She called a boy and ordered sherry.

Her French was as fluent, as eloquent, as soft as the native's. Again Gregory marvelled at the ease with which she spoke the language. Yet why shouldn't she? She had been schooled in Paris.

"Aren't you ever homesick for your Paris?" he asked.

She laughed. "Don't be silly. This is my home."

They sipped sherry until lunch was served, then dined royally in the shaded garden. Kathryn's easy chatter kept the two men smiling. She had that charm, rare in a woman, which made men feel on equal terms with her, and her sincerity rang in the tones of her soft voice.

After lunch they sat a while talking, but the wine and the heat of the day made them all sleepy. Kathryn relaxed

and leaned back in her chair, putting one beautifully soft arm behind her lovely head.

"Oh," she said drowsily, "I'm so lazy! Why don't we all take a siesta? You too, Gregory. The boy will see you're made comfortable out there on the porch."

"I can't. I have to go back to work." Gregory stood up. But he longed to stretch and yawn like a dog in the sun. He stifled the impulse. "Really I must go," he repeated.

"If you really have to," said Kathryn. "You'll come back again soon though, won't you, Gregory? I worry about you. I don't like to have you over there all by yourself."

"I'll try to get over more often then," said Gregory.


On his way home his thoughts remained with the pair he had left behind him in the garden. Kathryn's cordiality that at the time was so charmingly easy, in retrospect was even warmer. It was amazing how quickly he knew her; she made him understand, without an effort, her frank temperament, and put him entirely at his ease. Adam, too, was disarmingly congenial to the lonely young planter.

As he rode under the over-arching branches, the picture of Lilian rose in Gregory's mind, and lurking in the shadows of the background, was the sleek blond head of Dick Sayre. Dick and Lilian. Cool, aloof, gold and ivory Lilian— Suddenly her image was replaced by that of Kathryn. And beside the spontaneous warmth of the girl whose house he had just left, Lilian de Wolfe's always slightly haughty carriage faded.

Kathryn and Lilian. Impatiently Gregory shook his head as though to clear his mind. Women! Women! He thought bitterly to himself. His experience with Lilian had left him too deeply wounded to ruminate long on feminine charms. He dreaded the recurrence of his suffering, and shoving his reflections far back into his mind, he gave his attention to other matters.

## CHAPTER TWO

## WARNING NOTE

 HE work on Gregory's plantation began to center around the approaching harvest. The native workmen went about with an expectant gleam in their eyes, for with the coffee season arrived the gala days of the year, Noel, Jour d'An, Les Rois and Mardi Gras. It was the time of plenty, and everyone was touched with the spirit of work. Their drums beat merrily every Saturday night when they danced, and the coffee groves rang with their singing voices when they worked.

Gregory, too, was caught in the electric atmosphere. The rains had been plentiful and the coffee beans were beginning to swell, bending the branches with their weight. The air was clear and charged with an indefinable energy.

Despite the work on the plantation, Gregory found time to visit the O'Shea's quite often, ostensibly to talk with Adam of the approaching harvest, though secretly he realized that he would have gone far more rarely had Kathryn been away. He found he was being drawn to her by a force outside himself.

Kathryn was always glad to see him, and usually pressed him to stay to dinner. She had recently set up a small clinic at the back of her house, where she administered first aid to the workmen when they met with accidents, and gave advice to the women about health and children's diet.

"It sounds terribly sentimental, doesn't it?" she asked Gregory, "trying to pose as the little sister of charity."

"No," said Gregory gravely.

"As a matter of fact," she went on, "it's the most sensible thing I can do. When the men are sick, they don't work. Usually it's because they forget to take their quinine and their fever comes back. They all have malaria, you know."

"Yes," said Gregory. "Mine all have it, too. I tell them to get quinine at Don-don, but they don't seem to want to."

"Naturally not. It's too expensive for them, and besides, they'd rather go to

a *bocor* and have him make charms to cure them. It's much more exciting."

"It doesn't cure their malaria though."

"You know," said Kathryn, "I believe that if you'd drain the swamp beside your creek, there'd be much less malaria. We used to ask Olivier to do it before you came down, but he always put us off."

"Why, it is drained."

Kathryn looked at him blankly for a moment and he went on: "They are filling the last bit of low ground today. It's a pretty meadow now, and we've been planting periwinkles there. Some of them are already blooming."

"I can't tell you how glad I am to hear you say that," said Kathryn. "That swamp had always been my *bête noir*."

"Come over and see what it looks like now. I'm going to christen it tomorrow. I've just thought of a good name for it."

"What are you going to call it?"

"Kathryn's Dell."

She looked at him silently for a moment, then she smiled. "Why Kathryn's?" she asked. "Why not Gregory's?"

"I like Kathryn better. You don't mind, do you?"

"I think it's charming."

So Kathryn's Dell it had been named. Kathryn herself had come to the christening, and the two had opened a bottle of champagne for the occasion.

As the days passed, Gregory was beginning to see just what Kathryn meant to him. He looked forward with keen delight to the times he had set aside for his calls at the O'Sheas, and during the interim never ceased hoping Kathryn would ride over to Habitation Marshall from her house.

The season advanced and the ground under the coffee bushes was raked clean of all fallen leaves, ready for the harvest. Adam predicted a record crop, and Gregory, busy with the market quotations and freight rates, saw that his hopes, financially, were going to be more than fulfilled.

At this period the days were as busy for any coffee planter as they were for Gregory, yet Legrand, the mayor of Don-

don, suddenly found time to visit Habitation Marshall regularly. As often as twice a week his slim, white-clad figure could be seen dismounting from his horse at Gregory's front steps.

He seemed to take unnecessary interest in the American's plantation, although he did not altogether approve of the changes Gregory was making, and strove in a quiet way to discourage Gregory's hopes.

And Gregory, who had never been attracted to Legrand, now felt an actual dislike for him. What right had the mayor to sit on Gregory's front porch, drink his rum, smoke his cigars and at the same time criticize in a very suave voice his efforts to improve the plantation? For he had to admit that after each of these visits he was always a prey to new doubts as to whether he was doing the right thing.

He mentioned Legrand's persistent neighborliness to O'Shea, asking the older man how to be rid of his unpleasant guest in a way that would cause no hard feelings.

But O'Shea replied: "After all, Gregory, he isn't doing any actual harm. And he may simply be curious to witness the new ideas you've installed. He's not a stupid man; he's interested in your work. Besides, if you send him away, he'll be hurt, and it never pays to incur the enmity of a politician."

Gregory's visits to O'Shea's at this time were less frequent than before, and Kathryn was unable to come over to Habitation Marshall as often as before.

"I don't know why," she said as Gregory was leaving her house one day, "but it seems that everything has to happen at once. I have to go to Cap-Haitien tomorrow to stay a week or two, but I ought to be here every day. There's so much to be done."

"Why go to Cap-Haitien then?"

"The counsel's brother, Teddy, is visiting there, and I'm the only unattached female around here."

"So you're invited to entertain Teddy."

"Yes." She laughed. "A woman's always welcome in the tropics."

"But I need to be entertained too. Don't I count?"

"You'll be so busy next week you won't even know I'm gone."

"Oh, is that so? I suppose you think I won't miss you either." He was suddenly, to his own surprise, very earnest.

"I must go Gregory. I promised to stay as long as Teddy was in town. It won't be very long. He has to go home sometime."

When Gregory arrived home he was told that Monsieur Emmanuel Narcisse was waiting to see him. "Ask him out on the porch," said Gregory. "It's cooler there."

The boy went into the house and in a few moments Monsieur Narcisse walked out to the veranda. He was a large native of ample proportions with an enormous coal-black face. Strutting over to Gregory with a sort of elephantine dignity, he held out a fleshy hand on which sparkled an enormous diamond. Gregory invited him to be seated.

Monsieur Narcisse helped himself to a cigar from the box on the table at his elbow. Gregory's anger rose at the man's calm self-assurance, but he refrained from speaking as Narcisse lit the cigar and puffed on it reflectively before opening the conversation.

"Mr. Marshall," he said at last, "I've come to make an offer that I'm sure will help you."

"That's decent of you," Gregory said dryly. "What is it?"

"I noticed while riding out here that you've done a lot of work on your plantation. But," he smiled deprecatingly, "don't you think it is just a little too modern, too—well, complicated—for our ignorant workmen to understand?"

"I haven't noticed any bewilderment among them, Monsieur Narcisse."

Narcisse flicked with his little finger the ash from his cigar, a gesture that caused the diamond to twinkle impressively. "That, of course, is due to the novelty. Eventually the workers will become bored and return to their primitive methods."

"I disagree with you." Gregory was

annoyed at the superior disdain in Narcisse's voice, and he was angry at the assumed familiarity that allowed the native to criticize. "But we're getting away from the point," Gregory continued. "You mentioned an offer, I think—"

"Ah, yes," said Narcisse, displeased at being brought back to the object of his visit before he was ready. He concealed his discontent, however, and puffed blandly on his cigar. At length, with a look at Gregory which intimated that what followed was to be a secret between the two, he hitched his chair nearer and after a glance over his shoulder to make sure they were alone, began speaking.

"Mr. Marshall," he said, "I am here to represent a man who wishes to keep his identity secret. For the time being he will remain anonymous."

"Very interesting," said Gregory stiffly. "Is he afraid to let me know his name?"

"His reasons must also remain a secret, Mr. Marshall. I have been instructed to act for him in this affair."

"Well," said Gregory, "what is the affair? At least, you might let me know what part *I'm* supposed to play."

"Naturally, Monsieur. Briefly, it's this. My client wishes to buy your plantation."

Gregory looked at Narcisse in amazement. "What are you talking about? What makes you think I'd sell?"

"Why," said Narcisse calmly, "I knew a man of your judgment would never refuse the excellent terms I offer. My client wishes to buy your land outright. To pay cash."

"And how much," Gregory asked, "is he willing to pay?"

Narcisse mentioned a figure. It was ridiculously low; lower, in fact, than the amount Gregory expected to make from the approaching harvest. He laughed.

"I wouldn't sell for double that price. I'm afraid you're wasting your time." Gregory rose.

Narcisse remained sitting, puffing tranquilly on his cigar. "You would do well, Mr. Marshall," he said, "to consider my offer before refusing."

"But I haven't the slightest intention of selling. Furthermore, even if I wished

to, the amount you mention is far too small to be considered."

"Perhaps the price could be made more agreeable."

"Even so," said Gregory, "I wouldn't sell. I prefer to work it myself. And that, Monsieur Narcisse, is my last word. You may tell that to your anonymous client."

Narcisse changed his tactics. "Mr. Marshall," he said, "I happen to know that Miss O'Shea comes here very often to call." His voice was vaguely insinuating. Gregory stiffened and he went on. "I realize that it's only neighborliness that brings her here, Monsieur, but there are others at Cap-Haitien who would not be so kindly disposed; the counsel's wife, for example. She would think it indiscreet of Miss O'Shea to have spent the night here."

"She hasn't," Gregory said hotly.

"Ah, but it would be simple to find witnesses who have observed her," said Narcisse suavely. He did not see Gregory's lips tightening, and was surprised to find himself supported suddenly and none too gently to his feet.

"Get out," Gregory said evenly. "Get out of here, and if I hear a word about Miss O'Shea, I'll come to Cap-Haitien and shoot you."

Narcisse tried to cover his mistake. "You didn't think I'd really resort—"

"Get out!" Gregory shouted once more, and Narcisse hastily retreated.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE DRUMS BEAT

**A**FTERWARDS when he was recounting the adventure to Olivier, he was inclined to treat the whole matter lightly. He did not mention Narcisse's allusion to Kathryn, and merely outlined the anonymous offer, laughing at its absurdity.

Olivier, however, looked on the incident more seriously. He was convinced that beneath Narcisse's bland manner there lay a strong motive.

When he had finished dinner that night, Gregory sat on his veranda sipping a

cordial and smoking. The moon had not yet risen and the stars in the black canopy of the sky seemed very near. The palms whispered mysteriously in the air overhead while their white trunks rose like dim pillars in the dusk.

Far off, on the other side of the plantation, the drums were beating. A slight breeze carried the sound of natives singing through the silent groves, a faint wail, fitful and weird. Idly Gregory wondered why they were celebrating tonight. They usually waited until Saturday before they danced.

He was too comfortable where he was, however, to try to find the reason for their festivities. He breathed deeply of the jasmine scented air. The beauty of the night, the Negro songs, the somnolent air filled him with a feeling of almost intolerable poignancy. All his senses were drugged, and a great longing rose within him.

His mind reverted to Lilian, but her image evoked no response in his heart. He wanted something more real, something infinitely more precious. With a sudden exhilaration, he realized he wanted Kathryn. That he was in love with her, had always been.

A wave of emotion swept over him at the discovery. The air was impregnated with the subtle fragrance of her. A haunting sweetness filled his being; his very soul seemed to sing.

With a sharp yearning at his heart, Gregory rose and walked out into the night. The throbbing drums beat with his pulses, intoxicating him with their rhythm. A subtle change had occurred in the night. The palms, the starlit roadway, the white night-flowers blooming against the house, the house itself, all he could see, was touched with a new beauty. It was as though the simple thought of Kathryn had cast a spell over the place.

The moon was high in the sky when Gregory eventually entered the house, and although it was quite late, he could still hear the drums beating, the Negroes singing.

The next morning Gregory suddenly

sprang out of bed, and going quickly to the window looked out in the direction of his coffee groves. Although the day was not Sunday, the calm peace of the Sabbath reigned in the shade of the trees. Not a voice could he hear; no shouts, no songs. Nor did the echo of steel farming implements hitting upon stones reach him. The plantation seemed deserted, lonely, almost wild.

While Gregory was dressing, Olivier came into the room, his round face perspiring from the heat, his brow wrinkled with agitation.

"What's the matter?" asked Gregory. "Why aren't the men at work?"

"They refuse to work, Monsieur."

"Why?"

"They want higher wages, Monsieur."

"Higher wages? I'm giving them standard pay now. What's the idea?" Gregory was dressed now. "What's at the bottom of all this, Olivier? When could they have decided to do this?"

"I can't imagine, Monsieur. They knew you intended to start the harvest next week, and they probably think that by striking now they'll force you to meet their demands."

"Oh, so it's a strike is it?" Suddenly, into Gregory's mind drifted the echo of the drums he had heard last night. "Why," he asked, "were the workmen celebrating last night?"

Olivier was surprised. "I heard nothing, Monsieur," he said, "but if they were dancing, no doubt the strike was called then."

"But I can't possibly pay higher wages. I wonder who could have started the thing?"

Olivier was silent a moment before he replied. "Emmanuel Narcisse offered to buy your plantation yesterday," he said at last. "He was annoyed when he left, was he not?" His voice rose suggestively.

"Oh, so *that's* it," said Gregory grimly. "Well, he won't get far."

Olivier seemed a trifle uneasy at the anger he could see shining in the American's eyes. "What do you propose to do, Monsieur?"



"Do?" Gregory repeated. "I'm going out and have a talk with the men myself."

"They won't understand you."

"You're coming with me to make them." And getting his hat, he led the way out into the sunlight.

On the side of a hill to the extreme south of the plantation, a handful of mud huts were grouped together around an old well. The workmen, headed by their foreman, seemed to be expecting Gregory, for they were all gathered in the clearing when he arrived.

Through Olivier, Gregory argued with the foreman. He explained that the plantation had a large debt to pay off. The coffee was already ripe on the bushes and delay would mean financial loss. He was truly unable to pay higher wages at present, but if they would all help him now, he would be in a better position to discuss higher wages after the coffee had been gathered and shipped to Europe.

But his talk was in vain. In the end, feeling his anger rising, he thought it best to leave them. He hoped a day or two of inactivity would show them the error of their ways. Lack of money might lead to hunger, and hunger should prompt some action.

Yet as the days passed, conditions remained the same. The workers continued to live peacefully, smoking the tobacco their wives had raised for them on the hillsides, and eating the fish they trapped in the river. The very generosity of nature conspired against Gregory, for if it supplied the workmen with the necessities of life, it also matured the coffee beans so that they began to fall from the bushes.

Ruin stared Gregory in the face. He scoured the surrounding countryside in an endeavor to induce the peasants to work for him, but the men gave him an evasive reply and refused to leave their own gardens.

During this time he was unable to find time in which to visit O'Shea. Legrand, however, continued his regular calls at Habitation Marshall. There was a smug I-told-you-so in his eyes as he

listened to Gregory's difficulties, but he offered no suggestions that might be of help.

He professed himself astonished when he heard that Narcisse was behind the movement. He said it was hopeless if such a big man as Narcisse had interested himself in the plantation, and from then on, carefully avoided the subject of the strike, aside from asking on each visit whether Gregory was not yet discouraged.

The weather continued clear and warm, such perfect days as it had never been Gregory's luck to see, but he was so occupied with his problem that he hardly knew whether or not the sun were shining. He was sitting on his porch one afternoon, a mass of papers before him, and in a very disconsolate mood, when a man rode into the yard. A glance told Gregory that he was being honored by the cause of all his misfortunes.

Monsieur Narcisse swung down from his saddle and came up, hand outstretched. "*Bon jour*, Mr. Marshall. I trust I find you in good health."

Gregory ignored the proffered hand. "You find me in the act of making out an inventory. I regret I have not time to see you today."

"I won't take a minute of your time," said Narcisse with a slight smile. "I can explain the object of my visit right now." Then without waiting for Gregory's permission. "I noticed on my way through your plantation that some of your coffee has been lost because it was neglected when the berries ripened."

"Oh, you noticed that, did you?" Gregory asked acidly.

"I did, Monsieur. I also noticed that despite the obvious need for workmen, none were about. Unless you start harvesting your coffee I'm afraid you'll lose your entire crop."

"Just what do you suggest that I do?"

"That, Mr. Marshall, is the object of my visit. Perhaps now you find this country's manner of working a little unpleasant, and are willing to reconsider my client's offer."

Gregory was looking intently at Nar-

cisse. He was struck by the man's effrontery in coming to see him after the last visit, and the havoc to the plantation for which the Haitian was responsible.

"Your client's offer," he said, "interests me no more at present than it did at first. I have no intention of selling, nor do I care to see you again. Please be so kind as to leave now."

After Narcisse's departure, Gregory ordered a decanter of rum brought out to where he was sitting. It was sheer bravado that made him want to drink to Narcisse's retreat, for he knew that until the strike was broken, the native would remain triumphant.

Oh, well, he reflected in hopeless desperation, as long as he had nothing to do on the plantation, he might as well do it pleasantly. And so thinking, he poured himself a glass of rum and continued to sit morosely on the porch, sipping the beverage and brooding over his difficulties. An hour or two before sundown he was fairly drunk and in a smouldering rage.

It was at this point that Adam O'Shea rode into the yard. With a cordial "Hello," he came up on the veranda and dropped into a chair.

At the sight of the rum an expression crossed his face which Gregory interpreted as disapproval.

"How," asked O'Shea, not unkindly, "when I've hardly had time to eat since morning, do you find time at this stage to spend an afternoon drinking rum?"

"It's excellent rum," said Gregory. "May I offer you some?"

"Thanks," Adam smiled when Gregory's hand fumbled as he mixed a drink. "But I'm serious. How can you afford to waste the time?"

"Time! What's time during a strike?"

"I don't understand you. What do you mean—a strike?"

"I'm trying to forget it for the moment. What did you come over to see me about?"

"About your land, but—"

"My land," Gregory repeated. A sudden suspicion had dawned in his befuddled mind. Could it be that O'Shea

was the mysterious client interested in Habitation Marshall? Might not Narcisse be his agent? Narcisse would just about have had time to ride over since leaving to inform Adam of Gregory's refusal to sell.

"Yes," O'Shea was saying. "But tell me what's been happening here."

Gregory smiled bitterly. "Obviously you aren't as observant as your minion. You did not, apparently, notice the deplorable condition of my coffee while riding over here."

There was a sneering note in his voice that made O'Shea look at him sharply, but his voice was even as he answered, "I was preoccupied with what I was going to say to you when I arrived, and I didn't pay much attention to the trail. What's the matter with your coffee?"

"Nothing," said Gregory drearily, "except that it's practically ruined because the workmen are out on a strike."

"Strike? But I heard nothing of a strike. How did it start?"

"And that," Gregory said in the same bitter tone, "reopens the subject of your minion. The strike was started by your able, if obtuse, henchman, Emmanuel Narcisse."

O'Shea opened his mouth in amazement. "What makes you call him *my* henchman? Why, he's the crookedest lawyer in the country."

"My own conclusion," said Gregory. "Just why did you see fit to employ him to deal with me?"

"You don't think I've had anything to do with that scoundrel, do you? I wouldn't trust him for a minute."

"It's good to hear you say that," said Gregory, "though it doesn't explain why you engaged him."

"I didn't."

"And you didn't have the strike started either?"

"Certainly not." Adam was angry.

"At least," said Gregory, "you won't deny that your purpose in visiting me here today was to offer to buy my land."

Adam looked at him blankly. "How did you know that?"

"Surely you'll allow me some power

of discernment. After all, at one time I was quite successful in a business way."


"You think I started the strike to ruin your coffee," asked Adam angrily, "so that I could buy your land more cheaply?"

"What would you think yourself?"

O'Shea rose from his chair. "I think," he said coldly, "that you're a fool and more drunk than I imagined." And walking out to where his horse was waiting, he mounted and rode out of the yard without another word.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### IN CAP-HAITIEN

 HE following day, with a head that throbbed slightly, Gregory realized he was in a position that was worse than it had been previously. Had he been less drunk at the time, he knew he would have waited for Adam to make some incriminating remark. Now he had only jumped at a conclusion he could in no way prove correct, and he had also incurred the displeasure of the only other white man in the neighborhood. Worst of all, the man he had accused was Kathryn's father.

These gloomy reflections were interrupted by the houseboy who informed Gregory that the larder was empty. That, Gregory realized, would mean an immediate trip into Cap-Haitien. In his present mood, to ride horseback to Grande Riviere and the monotonous journey from there to the Cape by train was certainly an unpleasant prospect, but remembering that Kathryn was visiting there at present, he started out with more spirit.

He arrived at Cap-Haitien near lunch time, and went towards the hotel. On the way he debated whether he ought to make an attempt to see Kathryn that afternoon. In a way, it would be unfair, and he decided to wait until she had returned to London.

He was just entering the high, double doors of the hotel when he stopped short in amazed surprise and stared unbelievably before him. There, sitting on the

porch of the patio, dressed a little ostentatiously for the simple hotel, as coldly aloof as ever, and looking a bit incongruous against the background of rude walls and bare floors, was Lilian de Wolfe.

In one hand she held a cigarette, while in the other was a black lace fan with which she lazily stirred the air around her face, the tendrils of her honey-colored hair moving slightly at each puff of breeze.

She did not see Gregory at once, for she was talking to the mulatto landlady who ran the hotel, and Gregory stood there a minute in wonder. Looking at Lilian he found he still admired her, even that he desired her in a detached way.

As he walked over to her, he wondered idly what she possessed that had cast such a spell over him. She was beautiful, but she lacked the vital fire that makes even a plain woman attractive. Sitting on the cool porch, she might have been one of Pygmalion's statues waiting for the quickening breath of life. As the mulatress went out towards the kitchens, Gregory stepped out onto the porch.

"Hello, Lilian," he said.

Lilian glanced up quickly, apprehensively; there was something almost horrified in her expression. Only for a moment however. She collected herself and returned his greeting without a trace of self-consciousness. To Gregory it was as though they had taken tea together no later than yesterday, though it might have been a thousand years ago, so little had occurred between them, yet so much had changed.

"What a beautiful tan you've got," said Lilian. "You've been out in the sun a lot?"

"Every day," said Gregory. "What are you doing here?"

"I came over from Jamaica to see you."

"Why didn't you let me know?"

"I wanted you to be surprised."

"I am," he said dryly. "When did you arrive?"

"The day before yesterday. I've been

making arrangements to go to your plantation. Now you've spoiled all my plans." She pouted her pretty lips and looked up at him, her eyes open wide in a grieved glance. "You sound like a prosecuting attorney. Do you think it's polite to question me?"

"I thought that you were through with me—that you never wanted to see me again." Her facial expressions disgusted him faintly. He knew them all, had once thought they were a natural part of her, not a disguise to cover her inner mind.

"I know," she was saying, "but when I thought of you alone with all these native women—"

Gregory made a gesture of impatience. "Have you had lunch?"

"Yes," she replied. "I've just finished, but I'll sit with you while you eat yours if you want."

They went out to the side yard and sat down at a small table that had been set in the shade of an old grape-vine.

"Did you have a good time in Jamaica?" Gregory asked.

"Marvelous. Particularly at the races." Then softly, "But I got tired of Jamaica. I wanted to see you."

"And what's become of Dick Sayre? Were you tired of him, too?"

"Why, Greg! He was nothing but an old friend. I haven't seen him in years and years. He's in Switzerland now, I think."

"Time passes slowly for you, doesn't it? So Dick's in Switzerland and I'm in Haiti. In a way I'm flattered. But why did you choose to honor *me* with your presence?"

"Must you pry into *all* my secrets?" She smiled with a sort of pseudo-shyness. "I love you—I've come to you. That's all."

Gregory took a bite of melon, then leaned back in his chair and looked at her searchingly. "You don't love me," he said. "You've never loved me. You don't even know what love is."

There was an uneasiness in her eyes as she met his look. "How bitter you've grown. Is that what the tropics do to men?"

"That's not bitterness, Lilian, It's the plain truth, and you know it."

"You mean I shan't be welcome to visit you?"

"Don't be absurd. You can't stay in this filthy hotel."

"It's rather picturesque," she replied. "Besides, I'd rather be here than where I wasn't wanted."

"Miss de Wolfe," he said with mocking gallantry, "I'd be delighted if you could arrange to spend a few days at my poor home."

"A few days?" She seemed astonished. "How long do you intend to be in Haiti?"

"Why, Greg, must I put a limit to my visit?"

"You don't intend to marry me, do you?"

"That's hardly delicate of you. You used to be more tactful."

"I used to be in love with you."

She was silent, scanning his face. The waiter brought his coffee.

"I see," she said at length. "There's someone else—some country wench, I suppose. How I shall hate her!"

Gregory stood up abruptly. "I have to go and order supplies," he said. "Do you want to come with me?"

"No," she replied quickly. "I have to see someone here. I'll wait." She accompanied him to the patio.

"I'll see you at dinner then?"

"Yes, I'll put on my most ravishing gown."

Despite her easy conversation, a restrained excitement lurked within her. Gregory himself felt the strange undercurrent and wondered what disturbed her.

On the way to the store, his mind reverted to the first moment at the hotel when she had looked up and saw him standing beside her. Why, he asked himself, had she seemed so frightened when she recognized him? He gave up his speculations when he entered the store, and pulling a long list from his pocket, addressed himself to the clerk. When he was nearing the bottom of the column of supplies needed, translating in halting French, he felt a light touch on his arm.

"You look terribly busy," said a soft voice.

It was Kathryn. Her face was lit with a radiant smile of genuine pleasure. "It seems months since I've seen you," she said. "When did you get to town?"

"This morning." Gregory felt ill at ease with her after his scene with Adam. She, however, was so obviously happy to see him that she failed to notice his embarrassment.

"I've been simply pining to get back," she said. "Teddy left the day before yesterday."

"When are you going back home?" "Tomorrow morning. Why?"

Gregory gave her a startled look. "I have several things to tell you. If you can wait till I've finished here, we can go have a glass of beer and I'll explain."

Gregory finished with the clerk and made arrangements to have his supplies delivered at the station. Then he and Kathryn walked down the street and found chairs on the almost deserted porch of a small café.

"Now," said Kathryn, after their beer had been served, "what were you going to tell me?" She leaned forward expectantly, a half smile parting her lips and an eager friendliness in her eyes.

As simply as he could, he told her of his scene with Adam and of the suspicions he had entertained against him. "I didn't want to be the first to tell you," he continued when she did not speak. "I should rather have had you hear it from your father. I'd intended to avoid you until you'd had an opportunity of discussing it with him, but if I'd said nothing today when I met you, you'd have thought it odd later that I hadn't mentioned it."

"This is the first time I've heard of trouble on your plantation, Gregory. It sounds serious, especially with Narcisse behind it. We had trouble with him ourselves once. He sent one of his men to work in our coffee *usine*—an enormous black fellow; Gabelus was his name. I was frightened every time I saw him."

"I'd like to get my hands on him," said Gregory. "I'd—"

"You'd do nothing of the sort. Do you want to spend ten years in jail for attempted murder?"

Gregory smiled. "Go on, then. What did he do?"

"Gabelus? Nothing, really. One day I was walking over to the workmen's quarters and he jumped out at me from the bushes. I was scared to death. Fortunately, I'd heard talk of snakes around there and had my pistol with me, so there were no complications. I told father about it and he discharged Gabelus the same day."

She talked of the incident lightly, but Gregory knew she had been badly frightened. The thought made him want to protect her, to keep her from all harm. "Where's Gabelus now?" he asked.

"He's working here in Cap-Hatien," said Kathryn. "He was furious at losing his job at home, naturally, and Narcisse, of course, was displeased. That's all over now, though. What I don't see is how you thought Father would have started your strike. He's always been so fond of you."

"That's what made me so mad at the time, Kathryn. After Narcisse had gone, I realized what a hopeless mess I'd made of the whole thing. It looked as though I'd have to give up and go back to New York. I was pretty drunk when your father arrived; it didn't help matters."

"You still had no reason to act as you did. Father's as proud as a peacock. You've hurt him."

"How would you have felt in my place? Your father said he'd come to see about buying my land. Narcisse had just left after I'd made it clear that he couldn't buy the plantation."

"But what would father do with all that land? He has too much to do with his own."

"I still don't understand, and frankly, I still think he wants my land. He was mad because I'd found him out."

"Gregory!" Her Irish temper was aroused. "Don't talk like that about father. A more honest man never breathed. If you're going on like this I won't listen."

"Don't go, Kathryn. Please. I wouldn't offend you for the world. Nor your father either." She waited for him to continue. "It's just," he said, "that I'm up against a blank wall. The plantation's all I have left. If I don't make a go of it, I'm finished. When I arrived here everything worked so smoothly.

"Things were accomplished even more quickly than I had hoped, and then at the moment when everything was ready for the harvest, when I would have proved my theories, when the success I'd worked for was within my reach, Narcisse called his strike and the whole thing crashed. Do you wonder that I'm exasperated and suspicious?"

"No." Kathryn's voice was sympathetic. She had been thinking.

"Then your father—"

"Wait a minute," she interrupted. "Did father say he wanted to buy the whole plantation?"

"He didn't have a chance to."

Suddenly she put back her head and laughed whole-heartedly while Gregory watched her, puzzled at her amusement. "Why do you laugh?" he asked.

"I can explain the whole thing. It isn't such a great mystery."

"What is it?"

"Do you know that little piece of land that juts up over the hill from Habitation Marshall and makes a sort of peninsula in our property?"

He nodded.

"Father's going to build near there," she went on, "and he's going to need lime. I'll bet anything that when he came to see you, he was going to ask you to sell that little peninsula of land because it contains so much limestone. He knows you have plenty of land on your side, and probably thought you'd sell him that little piece as a favor."

"That's possible," said Gregory. "He didn't mention it. But—who is Narcisse's client? That isn't settled."

Kathryn grew serious again. "No," she said, "but if you go to Father and explain things, I'm sure he'd be able to help you more than you'd believe possible."

"Why, he'd probably refuse to see me."

"Leave that to me, Gregory. It was simply a misunderstanding."

They were silent a moment, drinking their beer.

"What I can't understand," said Gregory, "is how they managed to keep the strike such a secret. Both you and your father say you hadn't heard of it, yet I remember when I landed here, it wasn't more than twenty minutes before the whole town knew all about me and what I was going to do."

"That was different. In town everybody's curious about a newcomer. Out in the country the people like to settle their differences in their own way. They resent outside interference and they're clever enough to realize that silence is their most effective weapon against interference. I'll wager that, apart from your own workmen and Narcisse, you're the only one who's talked openly of the strike—"

She broke off and glanced into the street beyond Gregory. An expression of fear came into her face; she stood up quickly.

"There's Gabelus now," she said pointing to a husky native standing just below the porch of the café.

He and two other workmen were just returning from work, swinging their wicked looking machetes nonchalantly. Gabelus recognized Kathryn at the same time, and in a twinkling had started up the steps, the two others after him. There was an ugly menace in his eyes and the long knife gleamed evilly in the sun.

Gregory sprang to his feet, reaching automatically for the pistol at his hip. "What do you want?" he snarled at Gabelus.

His sudden move arrested the men. Gabelus checked himself and shifted his gaze uncertainly from the white woman to this new and unfamiliar protector. His expression changed to one of blank stupidity. "I—I—was passing, M'siè," he said servilely, "and wished to stop and say good-day to Miss Kathryn."

"Well, beat it," said Gregory. "She's not interested."



They backed away quickly and were soon lost to sight down the street.

"The coward!" said Gregory. "For two cents—"

"You'd make a sieve out of him, Gregory?" Kathryn had recovered her composure, and was smiling at him. A new tenderness was in her blue eyes.

What a marvelous girl, thought Gregory. He wanted to gather her into his arms and kiss her, but the thought of Lilian came between them abruptly.

"Kathryn," he said as they sat down again, "I've something to tell you."

"What?"

"I have an unexpected guest coming to spend a few days."

"Good," said Kathryn. "That will make four of us. Does he play bridge?"

"It's not a he, Kathryn. It's Lilian de Wolfe."

She gave him a surprised look and opened her mouth to say something, then checked herself before she had spoken. She sipped her beer in silence for a moment.

"Lilian de Wolfe?" she repeated after a pause. "Who is she?" Gregory was conscious of the disappointment in her eyes.

"What were you going to say?" he asked, paying no heed to her question, and then, not waiting for her to reply: "You were thinking that it's hardly conventional to have a woman staying alone with me, weren't you?"

"Not at all," said Kathryn. "I'm not a prude. I was thinking how wise you were to invite someone to visit you." Although she tried to make her voice sound casual, there was a new formality in it. "You must be very lonely at times."

Her sudden aloofness filled him with despair. "Kathryn," he said imploringly, "please don't misunderstand. Lilian's an old friend; I knew her in New York. She was in Jamaica and came over here for a few days before going home." He could see she wanted to believe him. That she was interested at all was something in his favor. "Kathryn, you *must* believe me."

"I do, Gregory," she said airily. "I'd be tactless not to. Besides, it's your own

affair, and I'm simply putting my finger in your pie." She rose to go, putting an end to the conversation. "When will I meet your guest?"

"Tomorrow," said Gregory. "We're taking the same train as you are." He was getting his hat, his back to Kathryn, and could not see the compassionate, almost maternal smile she gave to the back of his head, nor could he see the longing in her eyes, quickly veiled behind lustrous lashes, when he turned around.

"I must get back," she murmured, and led the way to the street where they found an antiquated auto to take them to their separate destinations. Kathryn avoided the previous subject on the short ride to the counsel's, and Gregory, intoxicated with her nearness, was happy even to be beside her.

When he returned to the hotel alone, he did not see Lilian until dinner.

She flashed upon him in a dress of coral chiffon. "I've been packing and resting all afternoon," she said. She seemed more at ease than she had been at lunch and kept up a continual conversation at table. Gregory, preoccupied with his own thoughts, was only too glad to let her talk. After coffee he excused himself.

"I haven't packed yet," he said. "I'll see you tomorrow morning. Good night." And notwithstanding Lilian's pout, he went out.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCORDS

IT was not a particularly pleasant trip on the train for Gregory the next morning. Kathryn was still distant, Lilian aloof, and Gregory tormented between both of them. Lilian after meeting Kathryn, decided, apparently, to have nothing further to do with her, and except for the few polite questions demanded by convention, addressed herself solely to Gregory. Kathryn, he could see, was hurt by Lilian's coldness, though she was at pains to conceal it, and Gregory gave her every courtesy, while Lilian, in order to attract attention

to herself, complained of the heat, the noise of the train, the discomfort of her seat, and the glare of the sun.

Never, Gregory vowed solemnly to himself, would he travel again with two women.

The ride from Grande Riviere to the plantation was a little better, for the horses were in single file and too far apart for easy conversation. Kathryn seemed to be completely taken up with the scenery, and Lilian contented herself with pointing out curious formations of rocks along the trail.

When they came to the gates of Habitation Marshall, O'Shea's foreman was waiting to take Kathryn home. Gregory dismounted and went over to where Kathryn was talking to the man, while Lilian guided her horse to the shade of an enormous mango tree that blotted out the setting sun.

Kathryn looked down at Gregory's earnest face as he came up to her. "I haven't forgotten about the strike," she said. "I'm going to talk to Father as soon as I get home. It's foolish to waste any more time now, and I think it would be wise to come over tonight after supper to see what he suggests. Bring Miss de Wolfe and we'll play bridge afterwards."

He asked her gravely. "Why are you so good to me, Kathryn?"

"Why not?" she said, smiling. Then she held out her hand impulsively. "*Au revoir*, Gregory. Remember, I'm with you, whatever happens." And without waiting for him to say a word, she waved her hand to Lilian. "I'll see you tonight, Miss de Wolfe." She rode off, followed by the black foreman.

"What does she mean—see me tonight?" asked Lilian.

"We're riding over to her house after dinner."

"Horseback? You won't get me on a horse so soon again. You can go if you please. I'm not moving from your house."

They rode down the lane towards Gregory's bungalow.

"But I can't leave you alone, Lilian."

"Why can't you? I'm not afraid of the dark."

"There'll be no one here except the house-boy."

"What of it? I'm beginning to think the natives have better manners than their employers. It's hardly polite to leave me on the first night here, particularly when you're going to see that girl."

"The main object in going to the O'Shea's tonight," Gregory explained patiently, "is to see the father. I've had some trouble on the plantation recently, and Adam can probably help me."

"Why can't they come over here?"

"I don't feel I can ask O'Shea to do that."

Lilian was silent for a moment as though she were considering, not what Gregory had said, but rather what reply she would make.

"I think I understand," she said at last. "It's perfectly obvious that Kathryn's the girl who's changed you so quickly. This means that whenever you feel you'd like to see her, you've made up your mind to tell me you're going to talk business with her father—She's prettier than I thought she'd be, too."

"Look here, Lilian, I won't discuss Kathryn with you. If you can't find another subject, let's not talk." Lilian annoyed him.

"And I," said Lilian, "have mentioned your rudeness before. I don't intend to stand much more of it. If you can't keep a civil tongue in your head, you'd better try silent thought."

They were both tired from the trip and both exasperated to find their wills opposing. A cold shower after they reached the house did much to remedy the former, but each remained fixed in his determination to have his own way. Dinner was a sorry affair, with Lilian picking petulantly at her food and Gregory sitting back plunged in thought.

"This is a very pleasant welcome, Greg," said Lilian sarcastically over her coffee. "I've seldom been more delightfully entertained."

"I must ask you to remember that you're not visiting a dilettante, Lilian. I have no time to spend entertaining

guests." He rose and stood waiting for her. "Are you ready to start now?"

"To O'Shea's? Are we going to begin that argument again? I thought we'd settled it that you were going to stay here with me."

"Either you're coming with me, or else I'm going alone."

"I'm too tired to move. I can't go."

"Very well, then. Good night." He took a step towards the door. In that moment he could willingly have choked her. What right had she to come breaking into his life again? She had told him once that she was finished with him, and now it seemed she took delight in meddling in everything he did. He walked out to his horse and mounted, but before he could start, Lilian came running into the yard.

"Gregory, wait," she called. "You can't leave me alone here. Suppose something should happen?"

"Can you recall that I suggested something very like that earlier this evening? You told me then, I think, that you were not afraid. Have you decided to change your mind now?"

"It isn't that I'm afraid, Greg," Lilian said in a softer tone. "I was lying. Nor is it that I'm too tired to go."

"Something else then?"

"Yes." Her voice was cajoling. "It's simply that I wanted to spend my first night in your house alone with you."

"Very jolly, I'm sure," said Gregory, shifting in his saddle. "Let me remind you, Lilian, that you chose for your visit a very busy season here. I've explained why I must see O'Shea tonight."

"But," she said appealingly, "I'm asking so little. Can't you do just this—for me, Greg?"

"Your horse is waiting if you choose to accompany me, Lilian. In case you don't, my overseer's wife will be here to stay with you shortly."

"Greg, darling—"

"I'm sorry, Lilian. Your dramatics are extremely convincing. A few months ago, I confess, I would have been quite won over."

"Greg!" Her emotions had been restrained too long. In a voice of passion-

ate fury she burst into a perfect outpour of abuse. For a full two minutes she stood there storming at him, calling him all the names she could think of, then as she saw anger affected him no more than her pleading, she stopped as suddenly as she had begun and walked back into the house.

Gregory, more disgusted than irritated at her lengthy tirade, rode into the welcoming gloom of the well-traveled lane leading to O'Shea's. For several minutes he was prey to a feeling of guilt in thus abandoning Lilian. She was new to the country.

Perhaps she'd be frightened with no one but Violette and the house-boy staying with her. On the other hand, he argued, she could have accompanied him. She could not be very tired, for they had taken the trip quite easily, and even so, in this emergency, she might make a small sacrifice of her personal comfort.

With this thought, he urged his horse towards the O'Shea's. Kathryn, warm and radiant as a morning in spring, rose in his mind's eye and for the time being Lilian slipped into oblivion.

As he rode into the O'Sheas' yard, a boy took his horse and Gregory went inside. Kathryn was not in sight, but Adam was striding through the room. There was a cordial smile on his face.

"Hello, Gregory," he said, holding out his hand. "Where's Miss de Wolfe?"

"She asked to be excused," said Gregory. "She was very tired."

"Too bad. I'd hoped we could play some bridge. "Kathryn spent all of dinner telling me your troubles."

"I'm afraid I acted pretty much like a fool the other day," said Gregory. "I'm sorry I was boorish, Adam. The end of the rope looked awfully near and I was ready to condemn anyone to save my self-respect."

"I understand," said Adam. "We'll forget it."

Gregory was a little surprised at the older man's comprehending forgiveness, yet it warmed his heart to hear Adam's words. He felt a sudden warm glow of affection for Kathryn's father.

"And now sit down and we'll see what's to be done about your strike."

They seated themselves opposite one another; Adam reached for his pipe and tobacco while Gregory lit a cigarette.

"Before you came here tonight," Adam said after puffing a moment on his pipe, "I had a talk with my foreman, and I managed to worm the whole story from him. Narcisse, it seems, appeared one night at your workmen's quarters, bringing a small barrel of *taffia*. He said he'd come to see his friends and cheer them for the night.

"Then after they'd absorbed enough of his cheer to make them pretty drunk, he started a vehement oration against the white landowners of Haiti, and held you up as an example. Your character, I have no doubt, was distorted, for your friend Narcisse compared you to the old French slave-owners, and reminded the men that their grandfathers had laid down their lives to put such tyrants as yourself from the island."

Gregory smiled grimly. "Whatever he said was effective. They all went on a strike, and from what I gather, they're going to stay on it."

"It's up to us then to get them off it."

"Yes," said Gregory, "but how?"

"Suppose you leave it to me, Gregory. I've been here a lot longer than you have and I've more influence than you'd believe."

"If you can think of anything to do, tell me how I can help."

"Nothing at present, I'm afraid. I haven't had time to really plan anything. Meet me at Dondon tomorrow when you go for the mail, and I may be able to give you some information." He stood up and went to the door into the hall. "Kathryn," he called, "you may come down now. We've finished talking business."

Gregory rose as he heard her light step on the stairs.

"I could have been a lot of help if you'd let me talk with you," she was saying as she entered the room. Then, turning to Gregory: "Where's Miss de Wolfe?"

"She couldn't come. She said she was worn out."

"I'm so sorry," said Kathryn. "She had a pretty hard day, didn't she?"

"If you don't mind," said Adam, "I'm going to do a little work here before I go to bed. Why don't you two go have a high-ball on the porch?"

It was a still night and black. A fragrant frangi-pani tree sheltered one side of the porch, and the mildly scented red and white flowers of *pois de riz* bloomed nearby. A ray of light streamed through an open window, throwing Kathryn's profile into relief against the shadows and touching her hair with high lights.

Sitting there, mysteriously beautiful in the half light, she was magnetically desirable to Gregory. He wanted to reach out his hand to hers; he wanted to draw her close and feel with his lips the softness of her throat. Her mouth filled him with a disturbing passion; everything in him yearned to touch her.

"You seem frightfully moody tonight, Gregory," she said, breaking the silence that had sprung up between them. "What are you thinking about?"

"I'm thinking how utterly beautiful you are."

She half raised her hand as though she were going to brush his hair lightly with her fingertips. Then, abruptly, she dropped it back on the arm of the settee. "I believe," she said, affecting a light tone, "you're making love to me. In view of the guest you have at home, do you think it's quite proper?"

"Kathryn, you don't believe there's anything between Lilian and myself, do you?"

"Is there?"

"Certainly not."

"Are you telling me everything, Gregory?"

"No," said Gregory, taking her hands, "no, Kathryn, I'm not. Once I thought Lilian could mean something to me, but that was before I met you. Since then—since then—I love you. You're all that matters to me. It's for you I've been working, Kathryn. I want to succeed for you. I want to give you everything. I

want everything beautiful for you—and I want you."

He had risen from his chair and had thrown himself down beside her, one arm around her waist, then an uncontrollable urge made him gather her in his arms closely. His heart was surging in his breast; his breath seemed inadequate as he bent and kissed her soft, crimson lips. At first Kathryn revolted in his arms, but as he lingered on her mouth, she returned his caress.

"Darling," he said at last, "you love me—"

"Yes, Gregory. I think I've always wanted you. It hurts me to think that you and Lilian—"

"Don't ever think of it again, dear. It's you I love. You *do* believe me, don't you?"

"Yes, Gregory, but I don't know why."

They remained on the dusky veranda until the moon rose, then Kathryn stood up abruptly. "It's after one o'clock," she said. "You've got to go home."

"I don't want to," said Gregory. "I want to stay here always."

Kathryn smiled. "Good night, Gregory." She held out her arms for him to take her. "I hate to send you back to that woman."

"Trust me, Kathryn," he said, pressing her close.

## CHAPTER SIX

### "BETRAYED!"

**I**N a state of rapturous happiness, Gregory rode down the trail towards home. Like black lace over silver brocade, the leaf shadows on the moonlit lane danced in an ever-changing pattern, while a soft wind sighed through the treetops.

Lilian had retired when he arrived home. Violette, the overseer's wife, her round form stretched on a canvas cot placed against the white woman's door, snored softly in her sleep. Quietly, lest he awaken the sleeping mulatress, Gregory went to his room and to bed.

The next morning he was up early and riding into Dondon to meet O'Shea

and to get the mail. Adam was just leaving the post-office as Gregory came up, and the two greeted each other cordially. As they were talking, Legrand and another official of the town walked past in a hurry. The mayor seemed quite excited, intensely interested in what his companion was saying, for he completely ignored the Americans after he had tipped his hat rather ceremoniously to them.

Gregory turned to O'Shea. "Well," he asked, "what news?"

O'Shea shrugged his shoulders. "None at present, but I've found out we have quite a little work to do to clear up the strike. I shouldn't wonder—" He pointed to the retreating figure of the mayor, "but what Legrand's had something to do with our trouble."

"I don't think so," said Gregory. "He's called regularly on me ever since the strike started, and was very sympathetic about the whole thing. I doubt if he'd care to if his hands were dirty."

"He wants to see how things are."

"What makes you suspect him?"

"Nothing definite. I just remembered that he and Narcisse used to be very close friends. They once put their money together to start some enterprise. I've forgotten what it was—something to do with copper deposits somewhere, I believe, although nothing ever came of it. Then Narcisse won the election to some political post Legrand had had his eye on, and their friendship cooled."

"But why would that pin suspicion on Legrand?"

"It doesn't, except that it was rumored recently that Narcisse was backing Legrand in his campaign for *Commissaire du Gouvernement* at Cap-Haitien. The election's due to come off in a day or two, which is probably why Legrand was so excited just now. The mail from the Cape has arrived and he may have received news."

"I still don't see what that has to do with the strike."

"I don't know that it has. I simply believe Legrand may be implicated in it. Narcisse wouldn't back him without asking a fee, and for all you know, you and

your plantation may be—what do they call it—unwitting pawns on the secret chessboard of politics.”

Gregory laughed. “What good would I or my plantation be?”

“No good, I hope,” said Adam.

Gregory went into the post-office to get his mail and Adam returned to his own plantation. Among the letters Gregory received was one addressed to Lilian. It was post-marked from Cap-Haitien and bore a Haitien stamp.

“I didn’t know you had any friends at the Cape,” he said as he handed her the letter on his return.

“I haven’t,” she said quickly. Then glancing at the writing on the envelop. “It must be from the landlady. I forgot to pay my bill.” She frowned at the letter and put it, unopened, in the book she had been reading.

“Did you accomplish your mission last night?” she asked pleasantly. She seemed to have forgotten her anger of the previous evening, and Gregory smiled inwardly at her new attitude. Firmness was all that was required, he concluded, to overcome a woman’s temperament.

He told her of his talk last night with O’Shea. The strike itself, he said, was not over yet, but he hoped it was.

Lilian in her present mood was gay, a little affectionate, but on the whole, good company. Lunch, surprisingly enough, was quite pleasant. Lilian apparently had decided to let bygones be bygones and make the most of her visit.

This was wise of her, thought Gregory, for had she persisted in her attitude of last night, he would have found a pretext to send her to Cap-Haitien to await the next boat north. As it was, he told her that she would have to be prepared to leave in a fortnight when the boat sailed.

“Just as you think best, Greg. Two weeks is a terribly short time for a visit though, after coming so far.”

Gregory was awakened by the house-boy the next morning. Olivier, it seemed, was waiting to see his employer. He walked in, his round face beaming. “*Bon jour, Monsieur. I have good news.*”

“What?” asked Gregory. “Already?”

“*Oui, Monsieur.* Your workmen reported on the plantation this morning. The strike is over.”

Olivier left and Gregory dressed quickly, wondering how O’Shea had managed to accomplish so much in such a short time. He was in high spirits at breakfast, although he ate alone, Lilian not having appeared yet. His horse was brought around, but before leaving, he rapped on Lilian’s door.

“I’m riding out,” he called gaily, “to witness the beautiful spectacle of men at work. The strike’s over.”

But Lilian did not reply. Whether she was asleep or whether she could think of nothing to say, he did not wait to find out. He mounted his horse and started in the direction of the coffee groves.

At noon he returned to the house. Lilian was waiting and the two had lunch served them on the porch, talking of the good news. But the torrid heat made them languid. Their conversation lapsed into long silences, while they wiped the perspiration from their brows. After lunch Lilian excused herself and went to take a siesta. Gregory remained on the veranda smoking a cigarette.

As he sat, half dozing in his chair, a man rode into the yard. With a start of surprise, Gregory recognized the portly figure of Narcisse, who dismounted and approached the veranda.

“*Bon jour, Mr. Marshall,*” he called, as he came up the steps. He wore a broad smile and carried himself with the same jaunty air of self-assurance that had so provoked Gregory when they first met.

“I admire your effrontery in coming to see me,” said Gregory. “I believe I told you to stay away from here.” He did not rise nor offer Narcisse a chair. The native, however, took no notice of the white man’s intentional rudeness. With a nonchalance that Gregory found unbearable, he pulled an envelop from his pocket and tossed it on the table beside Gregory.

“I bring you a note from your good friend, Mr. O’Shea,” he said, and plumped



himself down in the seat Lilian had just vacated.

The whole country's crazy, thought Gregory. Reluctantly he opened the letter. It read:

Dear Gregory—

Forgive my seeming tactlessness in writing this note for Narcisse so that he might have an excuse to call on you. As a matter of fact, I think it's the best course to follow. Because Narcisse, having defeated his own plans, now maintains that he sees the error of his ways and wants to kiss and make up.

I don't think you have anything further to fear from him, because for some reason he's decided to give up. It was he, not myself nor my influence, who called off the strike. And as long as he's working with you, you might as well pretend the whole thing was a silly prank. Don't rely on anything he says, however.

Yours, ADAM.

P. S.—This note may sound a bit cryptic, but don't let it deceive you. I mean every word I've written.

After finishing the letter, Gregory continued to stare at it as though re-reading the lines. Actually he almost burst out laughing at the absurdity of it all.

"Well," he said to Narcisse, "this seems to change things a bit. O'Shea says I have you to thank for breaking the strike."

"Think nothing of it," said Narcisse as though it were his habit to stir up trouble between employers and their men, then when everything was burning nicely, to call the whole thing a joke. "I like to help all I can."

It was on the tip of Gregory's tongue to make a biting remark, but he recalled Adam's note in time. Instead, he said: "May I offer you a glass of rum?"

The decanter was on the table. Gregory mixed them both a drink and the two men sat talking as though they had always been the best of friends. After a decent interval, Narcisse rose to go.

"It's been most entertaining to talk to you," he said, "but I must leave now. I'm planning to spend a few days in the mountains around La Victoire, and I want to get there before dark. When I go back to Cap-Haitien, I hope you'll come and have *un petit taffia* with me."

"I'd be delighted," lied Gregory.

Narcisse left and Gregory pulled the table nearer to him, and taking pen and paper, he began writing.

Dear Adam:

Just what in the hell is the real interpretation of the note you wrote me? What's the idea? Yours

GREGORY MARSHALL.

He called his house-boy, and giving him the note, told him to deliver it and wait for a reply. When the boy had gone, Gregory leaned back in his chair to smoke a last cigarette before going out on the plantation. As he was sitting there, another visitor entered the yard, coming from the north, the opposite direction in which Narcisse had left. This time it was Legrand, mayor of Dondon. Why can't they stay home, thought Gregory, as he rose to receive his visitor. Monsieur Legrand seemed very perturbed as he came up the steps and took the chair Gregory drew up for him.

"I've had some very bad news," he said, hardly waiting for a greeting. "Do you recall my telling you that I'd hoped to be appointed *Commissaire du Gouvernement*?"

"Yes," said Gregory. "What's happened?"

The fire in the Haitian's eyes was unpleasant to see. "I've been betrayed," he said. There was a grimace in his voice. "Betrayed!"

"Rather melodramatic," said Gregory. "Does that signify that you won't get the *Commissaire's* job?"

"It does. I know it means little to you, Monsieur, but to me it means my whole future."

"I'm sorry," said Gregory, quickly regretting his lack of sympathy. "But why are you telling me this?"

"I've come to warn you against an enemy."

"You mean Narcisse?"

"I do."

"You shouldn't have bothered then. I've never trusted him. Anyway, the strike's over and the men are working again."

"What?" asked Legrand incredulously. He seemed amazed to hear the news. "Do you mean you found men to break the strike?"

"No," said Gregory, "it wasn't necessary. Didn't you know my own men had gone back to work?"

Legrand looked at him blankly. "Impossible!" he exclaimed. "I would have known of it."

"It's true, nevertheless."

"How did you get the men back?"

"Your friend, Narcisse, sent them back."

Legrand stood up suddenly. "Narcisse?" he repeated.

"Yes, that's why it doesn't seem right to consider him an enemy."

The mayor took a few steps down the veranda and returned. He seemed scarcely to have heard Gregory, so busy was he with his own thoughts. His brows contracted and his fists clenched. "When did this happen?" he asked abruptly.

"I don't know," said Gregory. "Last night or this morning, I suppose. Narcisse was quite friendly when he came to see me this afternoon to patch things up."

"He came here and talked to you?"

"He left not more than ten minutes before you arrived."

"*Ah la salopris!*" Legrand exclaimed, forgetting his English in his fury. Gregory looked at him questioningly, but the mayor was overpowered by his own anger. "Do you know where he went?" he asked, snatching up his hat. "I want to find him."

"He said he was going to La Victoire for a few days."

"*N'importe,*" said Legrand, still fuming in French, "*je vais le trouver s'il va jusqu'à l'enfer.*" And running out to his horse, he mounted and galloped away.

Later, when Gregory and Lilian were having tea together, the house-boy came onto the porch and handed Gregory O'Shea's reply. Gregory excused himself and opened it.

Profanity, my dear boy, though not a cardinal sin, is not exactly a virtue. You should be more careful of your language.

The reason for the change in attitude as concerns Narcisse is very simple. Apparently he saw he was being beaten, and decided to give up, retaining as much of our esteem as possible by making the magnanimous gesture of destroying his own carefully laid plans.

This is not an unusual procedure here, for you will find few moral scruples among the natives. He-who-runs-away-lives-to-fight - another-day-sort of philosophy.

Anyway, I'm tired of the whole thing. My man tells me the wild guineas are thick on La Ferriere mountain. Let's go for a day of hunting and bring back a few birds. We can leave Friday and be back Saturday afternoon. Kathryn says Miss de Wolfe will be most welcome to spend Friday night with her, and you need have no fear for the safety of both.

Let me know if you can go, and I'll make the arrangements. I have a shack on La Ferriere where we can sleep.

ADAM.

To his surprise, Lilian did not seem annoyed when Gregory mentioned the invitation to hunt with O'Shea.

"You don't mind if I go, Lilian?"

"Of course not, Greg," she answered. "It will do you good to get away from your work for awhile."

"Kathryn sends word that she'd like to have you stay with her while we're gone."

"I'd rather stay here," said Lilian quickly.

"You won't be afraid?"

"Certainly not!" she scoffed at the

idea. "Tell me, when are you leaving?"

"Friday morning. We'll be back sometime Saturday afternoon."

She was, silent for a few moments thinking, then she rose. "Is anyone going to Dondon today?" she asked.

"Olivier's taking some mail in before the post-office closes. Why?"

"I ought," said Lilian, to send a check into Cap-Haitien for my hotel bill. You'll have the sheriff on your hands if I don't."

"If you send it now it will reach the Cape about midnight. The landlady will have it early tomorrow morning."

"Good," said Lilian. "I'll get it ready now."

She went to her room and later, when Olivier went to Dondon, he took her letter with Gregory's mail.

After dinner that night, Gregory sent a note to Adam accepting the invitation. He spent the rest of the evening getting out his guns and cleaning them.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### RAIN

**T**HE next morning he was up early and out on the plantation. Olivier had ridden into Dondon again to send a telegram for supplies, and Gregory was glad to be left alone to ride in peace through the shady paradise of his coffee groves.

The restoration of the old French mansion that had been in such sad repair when he first arrived was being rapidly achieved. Already the roof had been replaced, and the walls restored to their former condition. The simple beauty of their lines stood out against the dark foliage of the mammoth trees behind.

Gregory was contemplating the double curve of the front staircase when he heard his name called from the other side of the yard. He turned around and saw Olivier riding down the lane toward him, the Haitian's horse dripping sweat and lather.

"Monsieur Marshall. *Attendez.*" He seemed terribly excited.

"What's the matter?" asked Gregory when Olivier came up to him.

For a moment Olivier seemed unable to begin, then catching breath, he said: "Emanuel Narcisse was murdered last night."

Gregory stared blankly at Olivier, unable at first to comprehend the statement he had just heard. Then as the words gathered meaning, his blankness changed to incredulity.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "Why, I was talking to him yesterday afternoon. He can't be dead!"

"There was a knife in the back of his neck this morning."

"How did you find out?"

"In Dondon. The telegraph operator told me about it. I came back as fast as I could, because I thought you'd want to know."

Poor Narcisse, Gregory thought. A week ago he would have welcomed this bit of news. Now—"Did they find the murderer?" he asked.

"No, Monsieur. He was murdered on the trail a few hours outside of La Victoire by someone who must have known he would be passing there. They thought at first that it might have been the woman he keeps on his land near there, but she had gone to La Victoire to market, where she spent the night, so it couldn't have been she."

"Did anyone see Narcisse as he passed on the way?"

"Yes. He stopped a little more than half way along and rested at some peasant's house for about an hour."

Gregory was silent, lost in thought. An hour. In his mind the picture was forming of Legrand, unreasonably furious, shouting something incoherently as he rode out of the yard in the direction that might lead to La Victoire. He could not rid himself of the remembrance of Legrand's sudden emotion, for if ever a man was being carried away by his own anger, that man was the Mayor of Dondon.

He said nothing of this to Olivier as he rode home to lunch, nor until they had finished their repast did he mention it to Lilian. As they were sitting back in their chairs, Gregory lit a cigarette

and exhaled a cloud of smoke that hung in the motionless heat of the air.

"A little tragedy occurred last night at La Victoire," he said.

Lilian looked at him expectantly. "What happened?"

"The person that's caused me more trouble than anyone else in Haiti, Emmanuel Narcisse, was murdered last night."

He had not been looking at Lilian while he was talking, but her quickly indrawn breath as he told her of the crime caused him to look up questioningly. She was sitting bolt upright in her chair, one hand held against the soft pillar of her throat, a look of desperate fear in her eyes.

"Lilian, I didn't mean to frighten you." Gregory was struck by her agitated appearance. "There's nothing to be afraid of. It's just a feud between two natives."

"I know," she said at last. "I just had forgotten that things like that happened to—people on savage islands."

"Haiti's not savage, Lilian. Look at Chicago—look at Mexico. People are murdered everywhere."

His talk, light and aimed to rid Lilian of her fear, gave her the support she needed at the moment. Little by little, the color came to her cheeks. She leaned back in her chair and before long was talking as naturally as ever. She had not forgotten the murder, however, for when Gregory rose to go she stopped him.

"Have you a pistol, Greg?" she asked.

"Yes, why?"

"If you don't mind, I'd rather like to keep it in my room. I—"

"Of course," said Gregory. Going to his room, he returned with the pistol. "If you're still frightened," he said, "I won't go hunting with O'Shea tomorrow. It's not fair to leave you alone here."

"No," said Lilian. "I want you to go. You need a vacation and I promise not to be afraid."

That evening the air was heavy with rain; not a breath of breeze stirred the palm fronds. Heat encompassed the house in a humid wall, and insects hummed outside. Gregory had put on his lightest

pajamas and sat on the porch talking to Lilian, when a boy came into the yard bearing a message from O'Shea. It ran:

Poor Narcisse, he lost all bets, didn't he? I suppose some girl friend caught him when he wasn't looking.

I've finished preparations for the hunt tomorrow, and I'll stop by for you about six A. M. tomorrow.

ADAM.

There was also a note from Kathryn.

Darling: I wish you could manage to come over more often. It's become terribly lonesome here, and it's all your fault. Before you came I was perfectly satisfied. Now look at me.

Tell Lilian I'd like very much to have her here while you're away. In fact, although you needn't tell her this, I'd rather have her here all the time. I don't trust her with you.

Oh, Gregory, I'm such a fool and I love you so dearly, what shall I do? I guess I must have heat prostration tonight. I just can't seem to write anything sensible.

Forget everything I've written. Only keep on loving me, dearest, and come to see me soon. . . .

Gregory smiled when he finished reading the letter; then he sighed. There was a poignant protectiveness to the mood in which Kathryn's note left him.

"What news?" asked Lilian.

"Nothing," said Gregory. "Adam will be here early in the morning and Kathryn renews her invitation to you." He rose and started towards his room. "I'm going to turn in now," he smiled. "Good night."

When he awakened the next morning it was raining; with the persistence of tropic downpours, it fell in torrents, without the slightest sign of stopping for hours to come. Leaves and twigs from the trees, broken off by the force of the falling water, lay in a wet tangle on the ground. The air was chilled and even in the house, uncomfortably wet. Lilian had awakened early and appeared at the same time as Gregory for breakfast.

"Jolly weather for hunting," she remarked cheerily.

"I sometimes think your wit poorly placed, Lilian," said Gregory, looking out at the rain. "We may not be able to go."

"Of course you will. It will let up before long."

"You don't know tropical rain evidently." He was disappointed in the weather, and Lilian's complacent sureness chafed him.

"Anyway," said Lilian, "it would be fine weather for ducks if there were any."

"Unfortunately we're hunting guineas. They don't show a feather unless it's a clear, bright day."

"Well, you might as well go. You won't be able to do anything here today."

"If O'Shea doesn't go, the hunt's off."

"Nonsense," said Lilian. "You've got to go. You've made all the arrangements; it's too late to change them now."

"It's never too late in Haiti," he replied, smiling wryly.

Nor was he wrong. Shortly after lunch, through the still torrential rain that made rivers of all the trails, a boy came shivering to the house, where Gregory was sitting, impatiently trying to read. The boy stood dripping outside and called that he had a note from O'Shea. Gregory gave the boy a stiff drink of rum and sent him out to the kitchen to get warm. Then he opened. It ran:

Tough luck old man. The weather's too bad. We'll have to call off the hunt till tomorrow or the next day. There's nothing for us to do here, so if the rain lets up, Kathryn and I will ride over to your place for a game of bridge after dinner tonight. Have a hot toddy waiting in case we run into rain on the way.

ADAM.

With an audible groan of disappointment that caused Lilian to look up from the book she was reading, Gregory tossed the letter on the table.

"What's happened now?" asked Lilian.

"What I expected. We're not going."

"Why, of course you are. What sort

of men are you to let a little rain stand in your way?"

"My dear Lilian," Gregory was exasperated. "I've explained that one doesn't hunt guineas in the rain."

It was Lilian's turn to be annoyed. "I'd planned the day to myself," she said. "I wanted to write letters and do things I should. Now you go and spoil everything. What if O'Shea is afraid to get wet? Why don't you go alone?"

"To Adam's lodge? Hardly."

"Go over and see Kathryn then."

"In this rain?" Gregory shook his head. "Besides, they're both coming over here after dinner."

"Coming here?" Lilian rose from her chair. She was suddenly inexplicably exasperated. "Coming here?" she repeated. "They can't."

"Don't be silly, Lilian. Of course they can if it stops raining."

"I don't want them. I won't have them here."

"I must ask you to remember, Lilian, that you're my guest, not my wife. Of course they'll come. Furthermore, I want them."

"For my sake, Gregory, tell them not to come. You can ride over and spend the day with them."

But her sudden aversion to the O'Sheas angered him. Why should he be driven from his home to gratify a silly whim of Lilian's? "No," he said firmly, "their boy's left, and it's perfectly stupid to think of going out in that downpour. If they choose to come over, I'll be glad to see them."

"Very well, then," said Lilian angrily. "have them over. If they *do* arrive though, I won't leave my room." And walking across the tiled floor, she entered her room, closing and locking the door after her.

Supper, earlier than usual because the cook wished to go home, was eaten by Gregory in solitude. Lilian remained in her room, steadfastly refusing to come out unless Gregory would leave her alone and ride over to Habitation O'Shea. Her voice, through the door, had sounded almost hysterical, and Gregory wondered

if the heat of the day before had not touched her brain. This gave an added firmness to his resolve to remain at home that evening.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### AFTER THE STORM

**H**E returned to the porch after dining and sat staring glumly out at the sky. The rain had ceased, but clouds still shrouded the darkening heavens. He could hear the high heels of Lilian clicking regularly across the tiles of her room as she paced back and forth.

It was quite dark before long, and Gregory was rising to go inside when he was arrested by the gleam of a flashlight cutting stealthily through the underbrush a short distance from the house and at about a hundred yards to the right of the road. Then for a moment it went out, as though its owner, whoever he was, had just glimpsed the lamplight streaming from the windows of the house. With sudden stealth, Gregory left the porch, carefully avoiding the light from the windows behind him, and started in the direction of where he had last seen the beam of light.

Suddenly, from not far to his right, the light cut through the darkness again. As the glare of the flash was away from him, Gregory could see the unfamiliar form of a man, tall and slim, wearing a sun-helmet low on his forehead, silhouetted against the momentary radiance.

Carefully, lest he step on a twig and betray his presence, Gregory made his way towards the approaching figure and when he reached the point where the man must emerge into the open, he stopped, his heart beating excitedly.

He had not long to wait. Before long, from where he stood, he could see the figure heading straight for him. As the man came abreast of him, Gregory made a sudden spring and the two men were down in the mud, struggling silently but desperately, to finish one another.

Gregory's thighs were clamped around the waist of the other, and with his knee

he could feel a sharp, hard bulge on the man's hip. He realized instantly what it was, and that the owner was striving with all his might to reach the weapon. Gregory knew that if he loosed his grip an instant, he would be looking down the barrel of a pistol the next second.

Desperately he twisted back and forth, trying to find near him some object which would aid him. Suddenly, right under his wrist, he felt the cool, hard surface of rock, and without pausing for a second, picked up the stone, and quick as a flash, brought it down on the other's head.

Gregory felt the body go limp beneath him. Slowly, so as not to be surprised by a feint, Gregory loosed his hold, and taking the pistol from the other man's pocket, stood up. His heart was beating wildly; his breath came in sobs. For a moment he felt terribly weak from his exertions, and leaned against a tree for support. Then gathering strength, he removed his belt and secured it tightly around his captive's wrists. With an effort he managed to lift the inert body to his shoulders and carry him to the porch, where he dropped him unceremoniously to the tiles.

As the light from the window fell on the man's face, Gregory uttered a low exclamation of surprise. For there, his clothes soaked with rain and smeared with mud, a large bruise rapidly swelling on his forehead, just below where the fair hair started growing, lay Dick Sayre.

For a second or two Gregory stared at the prostrate figure. The night was still; Gregory could hear his own breathing, and from the house, the regular foot-falls of Lilian pacing the tiles of her room could be heard. Seemingly she had heard nothing of the struggle in the dark.

Gregory's first impulse was to call her, but realizing that the sight of Sayre, apparently dead on the floor, might unnerve her, decided that it would be better to carry the man into the house and make him more presentable first. So thinking, he loosened Sayre's hands and lifting him in his arms, took him into the house,

where he put him on the chaise-longue in the living room.

Sayre was still breathing, and the regular rise and fall of his chest reassured Gregory. Best, however, to loosen his clothes and bathe his wound. Gregory unbuttoned Sayre's coat, and half raising him, removed the mud-stained garment. As he did so several papers fell out of a pocket to the floor. What he saw made him suddenly stop. There lay two envelopes and a neatly folded paper which was yellowed with age.

It was the familiarity of this last that had startled Gregory, for when he examined it, he found it to be the missing survey, the one he thought he had lost in New York. For a few moments he looked uncomprehendingly from the papers in his hand to the unconscious figure of Sayre on the chaise-longue. Then in a sudden flash he realized what had happened.

He felt a quick revulsion when he thought of Lilian still pacing in her room. He was actually harboring in his house a person who had stolen from him, and here, on the chaise-longue in his living room was her partner in crime. It was Sayre who held the document, not Lilian, and, Gregory reflected, seeing more and more clearly, it probably was also Sayre who had been behind Narcisse's anonymous offer.

One of the envelopes contained a bill, but in the other were two sheets of Gregory's own personal stationery which bore his name and address. On the envelop, written in a large hand that he instantly recognized as Lilian's, were the words: "Kindly deliver to Richard Sayre." Nothing more; no stamps; no address. This, then, thought Gregory, was how she paid the hotel bill.

After a moment's hesitation, Gregory spread out her letter. It began:

Darling Dick—

You were very foolish to write to me here. Suppose Gregory had opened your letter by mistake? You must be more careful. Don't you trust me? If there were any important news, I

would have found a way to let you know. Neither Legrand nor Narcisse have been here, and it begins to look as though the strike would be a success after all. Greg seems terribly discouraged.

That, Gregory thought, was decidedly untrue. He had not been discouraged at any time since he had found Lilian so unexpectedly that day. She may not have known that both Legrand and Narcisse had called the very afternoon she had written this letter, but she was perfectly aware that the strike had been a dismal failure. What could be the purpose of her deliberate lies? O'Shea had been right, it now seemed, for Legrand had been involved as well as Narcisse. A pretty quartet! Yet from her letter, Lilian had been intentionally deceiving her confederates. Why? Did she intend to take things into her own hands and continue the play without them? Or was there some other reason? Gregory continued.

I think it very unwise of you to want to come out here. We'll both be safer if you stay there in Cap-Haitien. Gregory suspects nothing and thinks you are in Switzerland. But if you come out here, someone may see you. Besides, I swear everything is going along as well as may be expected. If you come here, you'll only see for yourself that what I say is true.

The reason, probably, that you haven't heard from Narcisse, is the same as the reason you haven't heard from me. Nothing definite has happened. Legrand, naturally, wouldn't write. The clerk might open the mail in the post-office.

That also, thought Gregory, was wrong, although Lilian may not have known it. The reason Narcisse sent no word to Cap-Haitien was because he had betrayed his client. It was Narcisse himself who had put an end to the strike, and Legrand had been so taken up with his own misfortunes that he had not heard of Narcisse's perfidy.



If you still insist upon coming up here, and remember I'm opposed to the idea, you must leave Cap-Haitien in time to arrive at the plantation Friday night. Greg is going hunting and will be away then. Come directly to the house, but don't call. A Negress may be staying with me. Greg usually insists upon this when he's gone. It would be better to look through the windows to make sure there's no one about.

And *that*, Gregory reflected, was probably why Lilian had been so irritable when she learned the hunt had been called off and there seemed no way in which she could rid herself of him.

Don't think (Lilian continued) that Greg holds any further interest for me. When I first met him it was your stupid jealousy that nearly lost us everything, and I don't want to run the risk of that again. Believe me, Dick, you're the one love I have and I've always been true to you....  
LILIAN.

For a few minutes after finishing the letter, Gregory stood there, his mind whirling with thoughts. The lamp fluttered in the light breeze that had sprung up and was now rustling through the palm fronds outside. Chicadas had taken up their monotonous chant after the rain, and far off, across the plantation, a drum beat softly. In her room Lilian still walked back and forth across the floor. Sayre, stretched out on the chaise-longue, lay without moving; his regular breathing marked the passing seconds.

Suddenly Gregory heard the faint jingle of saddle rings and curb chains, accompanied by the thud of horses' hoofs falling in the soft mud of the yard, and in a moment Kathryn and Adam had entered the room.

"Hello, Gregory," Kathryn called. "Where are our hot toddies?" Then, her eyes falling on the figure of Sayre, she took a frightened step backwards. Adam saw Gregory's victim at the same time.

"What happened? Who's that?"

Gregory glanced behind him at Sayre. "I'm still wondering," he said. "I don't know just exactly where he's supposed to fit." He was moved to a sort of bitter mirth when he realized that Lilian had ceased her pacing with the arrival of the O'Sheas. She must even now be standing in her room listening intently.

"But what does it all mean?" Kathryn's eyes were troubled with question. She remained standing where she had stopped as though not daring to enter farther into the room. "Is he dead?"

"No," said Gregory. "Only stunned."

"Gregory," said Adam, "don't be so unconcerned. What's happened?"

Gregory walked over closer to him. In a tone that could not be overheard by Lilian, he explained the whole sordid story to them.

"Then you knew this man?" Adam asked.

"I met him in New York. He was a friend of Lilian's."

"And you think he and Lilian are responsible for the strike?"

"Without a doubt."

"But why should they?"

"That," said Gregory, "remains to be solved. I imagine we'll find the answer in this." He showed them the old document he had taken from Sayre's coat. "Unfortunately it's in French; I can't read it."

"Let me see it," said Kathryn.

Gregory handed her the paper. Kathryn's eyes raced over the lines of faded script seeking the words that would explain away the mystery. Towards the bottom of the page her eyes stopped abruptly and reread a few sentences. Then, in a sort of incredulous wonder, they turned to Gregory.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Copper," said Kathryn shortly. "There's a rich deposit on your property." Her eyes returned to the paper she held in her hand, while Gregory stared at her in amazement. Then in a half whisper, she added: "It's on the strip of land Father wanted to buy from you. Under the limestone."

"Copper!" Gregory repeated slowly.

Before Katherine could answer, however, a voice answered from the other side of the room.

"Yes, copper! Real copper!"

It was Lilian who had entered the room while they were occupied with the old French survey. She was wearing a magnificent negligée of flame colored silk that brushed the floor with its trailing skirt and sheathed her body in a scintillating cover. Her golden hair fell over her shoulders in a cascade of light, but her blue eyes flashed a dangerous fire; her vivid lips curled slightly as she talked. She moved slowly towards them, her body swaying as she walked.

"It's a rich vein," she went on, "waiting for you to—" She broke off suddenly catching sight of Sayre, who had been concealed from her by the back of the chaise-longue. She stopped in her journey across the room and stared breathlessly at the still figure. For a moment, stark fear could be seen in her eyes. She half raised her hand, then sensing the scrutiny of the others, let it fall to her side again. She straightened her shoulders and lifted her head proudly.

"Is he dead?" she asked in an ordinary tone of voice, indicating Sayre.

Gregory, watching her, could not help but admire her self-control, her perfect *sangfroid*, as she asked the question. She was rather splendid as she stood there in her brilliant negligée, her hair half concealing the soft ivory of her throat.

"No," said Gregory. "Dick's only unconscious. He'll be all right, I imagine, and when he awakens, I hope he won't be too indisposed to accompany you into Cap-Haitien. You've managed to make as much trouble for me as even you could wish, and I'll feel better when I know you've left the country."

"Greg," Lilian took a step towards him. He could sense Kathryn stiffening where she stood, but Lilian was disdainful of rivals. She moved slowly over the floor, her skirts making a soft noise on the tiles, until she was in front of him, her blue eyes focused on his brown ones. "Greg, dear, don't you know I've

been working for you? You must think that."

"What do you leave me to think? Your actions show how thoroughly against me you have worked."

Lilian swayed a little closer to him; a faint wave of her perfume rose to his nostrils. "And the strike, Greg?" Her voice rose tantalizingly. "Who finished it for you?"

"Poor Narcisse did that."

"Narcisse," said Lilian, "stopped the strike at my orders. It was I who sent your men back to work. I've been trying to keep Dick from trying to sell."

Gregory remembered the strange falsity of her letters. She *had* been deceiving Sayre, it was true; there was something decidedly convincing in her last statement, but he hesitated to believe her.

"When did you tell Narcisse to call off the strike? You haven't seen him since you've been here."

"If you remember the last afternoon we were at Cap-Haitien, I stayed at the hotel while you went to buy supplies. Narcisse came into town that day to see Dick, but Dick was in Plaisance and I was left with Narcisse. When I met you at lunch, all my old love for you was awakened. I saw what a fool I was not to have come down here with you in the first place—but Dick had other plans."

"So I notice," said Gregory dryly.

"When I saw you in the hotel that day," she went on, "I realized what an animal Dick had become. We'd gone to Jamaica, where we'd managed to make a little money on crooked racing. We spent all we raised on the bracelet you'd given me in New York and needed more to start work on the copper mine."

"We had to live in a small hotel because we were afraid we'd run into someone who knew Dick. He was nearly always drunk and he'd made several enemies in Jamaica." She shuddered slightly at the memory. "But before we'd finished at the races, Dick thought someone was watching him. We had to leave before we had the money we needed, but when we arrived here and saw you were making a success of your plantation, we

didn't know what to do to make you leave. To have offered to buy the northern half where the ground was not particularly fertile might have caused you to be suspicious.

"We thought it pure good fortune when Dick stumbled on Legrand and poor Narcisse. Legrand had found a note of the copper deposits in some old register. He and Narcisse had tried to acquire title to the land some time ago, but they hadn't enough money between them. When they heard that Dick was after the same thing, they threw their cards in with ours.

"But I couldn't go through with it, Greg. When Narcisse came to the hotel that afternoon, I pretended I had a better plan and told him I was going out to stay with you. He was to call off the strike, then you—according to what I told him—were going to give him and myself each a third share in the mine.

"When the strike was over I was going to talk to you. I couldn't hope for much success, but I'd given my word to Narcisse. When he was killed, I was frightened. I thought that Dick had found out Narcisse had turned traitor and had murdered the poor man in cold blood. Even now I don't know whether he did or not."

"I don't think he did," said Gregory. "But why should a death or two affect you? You've lied, cheated, stolen—"

"Greg," she interrupted suddenly, putting her arms around his neck, "I love you. Even when I didn't know it, I loved you. It's true I stole your deed. It's true I've lied to you, but Greg dear, it was Sayre who made me. He said he'd tell you all about me, but that day when you came into the hotel nothing mattered. I could explain everything to you later—"

Gregory disengaged himself coldly from her embrace and held out the letter she had written to Sayre.

"You seem able to shift your affections very readily. You told Dick in this letter, I believe, that he was your only love."

(*The End.*)

"I had to. I couldn't have him come out here and find your men at work. Don't you see, Greg, that it was my love for you that made me want to protect you?"

"Miss de Wolfe," said Kathryn; she had been watching Lilian all through the long monologue, "from what I gather, Gregory once asked you to marry him. You refused. Furthermore, after refusing you endeavored to steal his last possession.

"You once pretended to love him, but when he lost his money you were through with him. Sayre, now having been defeated, you claim to have found your old love for Gregory. Perhaps if you were to find a man on the plantation here right now with enough money to support you, you'd discover that you suddenly loved him."

Lilian turned on Kathryn savagely. "You keep out of this," she said. "None of this concerns you."

"I think it does," said Kathryn quietly. "How?"

"I love Gregory," said Kathryn. "I have no doubt of it, nor am I wavering between him and someone else who might have more money. I love Gregory."

"Love," said Lilian, sneering, "what do you know of love? You don't even—"

"That's enough, Lilian," said Gregory. "Please go pack. You and Dick are leaving early tomorrow morning."

The things that happened that night are somewhat dimmed by the passing of time. On Habitation Marshall there is an old French mansion restored to perfect condition. In it live a planter and his wife, and if you should happen to stray into the darkened gardens some night when the air is heavy with the fragrance of jasmine, you might see two figures strolling through the long dusky allées.

Perhaps, if you are near enough, you will hear Kathryn's soft little laugh, or perhaps Gregory's tranquil voice will reach your ears.

# Dead Men Aboard

MYSTERY AND ROMANCE ON THE  
HIGH SEAS

By  
J. LANE LINKLATER

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W. C. BRIGHAM, Jr.



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*Jack, half stunned, struggled to his feet. The girl was staring at them. "Why did you let him in here?" Jack asked her. . . . (Page 59.)*

# DEAD MEN ABOARD

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE LAST TRIP



FIRST MATE JACK COBB last saw Captain Snow alive about eleven o'clock that Tuesday night, just before the captain turned in. Jack ran into him on the after-deck, where the captain was taking a last turn about. The captain stopped and spoke to him. Usually the old skipper was not particularly sociable, but tonight a dreary mood seemed to have settled on him, and it thawed the stiffness out of him.

"Well, Mr. Cobb," he said, with a sort of mumble, "we'll be parting company with her soon."

"Yes, sir," said the first mate, not without sympathy.

The captain was referring, of course, to the boat, the *Pacific Beacon*. She was a small craft, as ships go, carrying mostly freight, with a few passengers, but Captain Snow had been in command of her for a good many years. And this was her last trip.

The owners had decided that the *Pacific Beacon* had out-lived her usefulness. The captain would have contended that she was good for years yet, but the owners regretted that they could not agree with him. To their own sorrow—looking at it from a cash point of view—they had come

to the conclusion that the captain's pride and affection outweighed his judgment.

So, for the last time, the *Pacific Beacon* had sailed from San Pedro at seven o'clock that evening on its last regular run to San Francisco, after which it was destined for the bone-yard. Small wonder that Captain Snow was melancholy. His life was in those old sagging decks which his feet had trod for nearly a quarter of a century.

The captain had stopped pacing and was staring at the hazy outline of the California coast, as if he never expected to see it again. He was a great navigator, even if his command was small. His men often said that he could sense danger ahead for his ship without chart or compass, and avoid it. Perhaps he even then sensed danger for himself—although he could not avoid that.

There was an awkward pause. The captain said nothing. First Mate Jack Cobb was silent, too. Suddenly the captain turned on his heel and strode forward.

"Good night, Mr. Cobb," he said thickly, over his shoulder.

"Good night, sir," said Jack Cobb.

The captain disappeared, evidently going directly to his cabin. Jack, tall and spare, his pale, lean young face troubled, stared after him. Unbending, and a trifle hard, was old Captain Snow, but a great

navigator and a fine man, and his young first mate nursed an unspoken affection for him.

Just before daybreak the next morning, a little before four bells, Fred Cary, quartermaster, rushed up to the bridge. Cary looked badly shaken.

"What's up?" snapped Jack.

"The—the captain, sir," stammered Cary.

"What about him?"

"Captain Snow, sir, is—is dead!"

"What sort of a joke is this?" roared Jack.

"He's dead, sir," repeated Cary solemnly. "One of the deck hands just found him. Down on the well-deck, sir. He—he must have slipped and fallen from above, sir."

His face dead white, his heart almost stopped, Jack raced forward and down the stairway to the well-deck. There a little knot of seamen, in the murky gloom just preceding dawn, were gathered about a tall, gaunt form flung on the deck in a pitiful heap. With the seamen was one of the passengers.

Jack bent down and touched the body reverently. It needed no technical examination to confirm the quartermaster's tale. Captain Snow was dead.

Gently and with great care, Jack lifted his head and turned it about. There was blood, still fresh, in the gray hair. There were streaks of blood down the sides of his face.

Jack straightened.

"Carry the captain," he said hoarsely, "to his cabin."

Quietly, several of the men picked him up and carried him up the stairway and put him on his bed in the cabin which had been his for a large part of his life. Jack accompanied them. The men stood about a bit, respectfully, until Jack waved them out, giving one of them a message for the radio operator. And soon he was left with the dead man.

He sat in a chair and looked at his dead chief. His eyes were hard and his heart was bitter. For years Jack Cobb had looked forward to the day when he would have a command of his own, when

he would be master of a ship. That day had come! But under what circumstances! He was master of a ship which was on its last trip, and its old master dead!

And how dead? Accident? Had the old skipper really slipped and fallen? First mate—now captain—Jack Cobb knew better. Captain Snow would not have slipped and fallen. And there, on that fine old head, was evidence of a blow which had been made by a brutal instrument in human hands.

"Murdered!" Jack muttered savagely. "Murdered!"

## CHAPTER TWO

### ONE IN SEVEN

**B**UT why? And by whom? By one of the crew? Slowly, carefully, Jack checked over the crew one by one. Old Captain Snow had out-lived a good many crews, but there were no new men on this trip. Most of them had been on for months, and some of them for years.

Jack knew them all. He shook his head over each one. Some of them might have grumbled, as seamen have a way of doing, but he felt that most, if not all of them, had been more than a little proud of their skipper. He could think of none of them who loomed as a possible murderer.

That left the passengers, probably all of whom were new on the ship. So far Jack had no more than nodded at any of them. There were, as he recalled, only seven. Business was bad and patronage had dwindled. The traveling public had not agreed with Captain Snow's appraisal of the *Pacific Beacon*.

In a little while Jack sent for Second Mate Mattis, who was now automatically promoted to first. A large, stolid man, Mattis, a good deal older than Jack, but lacking Jack's ambition and education. He was, however, a good seaman, more dependable than the average, satisfied with a mate's post and with no expectation of anything better. Jack had a good deal of respect for him.

"A bad business this, Mr. Mattis," said Jack.



"Yes, sir," the mate soberly replied.

He was calm enough, outwardly, but his eyes were moist as they glanced at the form on the bed.

"And no accident," said Jack.

"What's that, sir?"

"It was no accident. It was murder!"

The mate's blue eyes grew hard.

"Captain Snow was hit over the head with a heavy instrument," Jack went on, in a low voice. "I wish you'd look around for anything that might have been used, Mr. Mattis. Although the chances are you'll find nothing. It would have been easy for the murderer to pitch the weapon overboard."

"I'll look, sir."

"Very well. You've noticed nothing suspicious among the crew?"

"Nothing, sir," said Mattis, uneasily.

"I—I don't believe none of the boys in the crew, sir, would—"

"That's what I thought. How about the passengers?"

"I haven't seen much of them yet, sir."

Jack was silent for a moment.

"Mr. Mattis," he said solemnly, "there's a murderer aboard. We've got to keep a sharp look-out. No one knows that it was anything but an accident, except you and me and the radio operator—and the murderer. Let things stay that way."

"Yes, sir."

"But in the meantime keep your eye on the passengers," Jack proceeded. "We've got to get that damned murderer before we reach San Francisco tomorrow morning. I'm depending upon you, Mr. Mattis."

"I'll do all I can, sir," said Mattis fervently.

Shortly after Mattis left, the breakfast gong sounded. Jack loitered in the captain's cabin for several minutes. He wanted all of the passengers seated at table before he entered. Pulling himself together, then, he went down to the dining room below, and seated himself at the head of the table. His face was serious, but calm. All of the passengers were seated at the table over which he, as captain, was now presiding.

There was a queer silence for a little

while, as Klitters, the steward, took his order. Then the passengers murmured good mornings, to which he responded quietly. But the strangeness of being thus addressed deferentially as master of the ship was almost lost in the grim determination he felt to corner the murderer.

In a flash, he took in the faces at the table; seven of them, six men and one woman. Their eyes were fastened on him curiously. The men were a mixed lot—not often people of means traveled on the *Pacific Beacon*—but the woman, he observed, was young and unusually pretty, slim, dark-eyed, trimly but inexpensively dressed. She had the place immediately to his right.

The man at the foot of the table was the first to speak. Jack recognized him as the one passenger who had been in the group which had surrounded the body of Captain Snow. He was a tall, long-faced man, with a habit of smirking.

"Too bad about Captain Snow," he said, although the half-grin on his stupid face indicated that he thought it a sort of a joke.

Jack nodded. He looked from one to another.

"Very bad," he agreed. "Still, it was probably just as well for the poor old fellow—he wouldn't want to live long after his boat had been taken out of service. And we might as well make the best of it. Suppose we get acquainted. I am"—his voice was husky in spite of himself—"Captain Cobb."

He turned first to the young lady. She managed a nervous smile.

"I am Grace Maple," she said.

There was an awkward silence.

"My name's Flower. Elmer Flower," said the man next to her. He looked at Jack out of mild, blue eyes. He was, Jack judged, past middle age, and slightly built. Thin, brown hair was plastered down tightly against his skull. His head was large, cube-like.

"Thank you, Mr. Flower," said Jack. "And you?"

"Bill Morris," growled the next man. He was big, heavy, surly, and dressed in a cheap light-colored sport suit.

It was now the turn of the tall, long-faced man at the other end of the table. He was eating oatmeal, and he halted his spoon halfway to his mouth.

"I'm Chester Milton," he volunteered. "Chester Milton, inventor."

There were three passengers left now. The man next to Milton introduced himself as Charles Poppy, a somewhat pompous man with a heavy voice who claimed to be an actor. Then there was a rather good looking young man whose hands indicated a mechanical occupation. His name, he said, was Frank Wethering, and he was just completing his introduction when the last man, seated to Jack's left, got up and hurriedly left the table, ascending the stairs to the deck.

The others all watched him go. He was a little, bald-headed man, with a round face and large brown eyes, and he looked very pale.

"Well," remarked the tall man at the far end of the table, who had given his name as Chester Milton, "our friend doesn't seem to be very sociable."

His comment was accompanied by his ever-present grin. None of the others ventured a remark, until after a few moments of embarrassed silence the young lady arose diffidently to her feet.

"That is my father," she said rather stiffly. "He—he is not well. If you'll excuse me, I'll go and see if I can do anything for him."

Jack bowed courteously, and Miss Maple followed the little man up the stairs. He felt, vaguely, that he had seen Mr. Maple's face before.

The passengers continued with their breakfasts in a subdued sort of way; all except Milton, who was finishing his oatmeal with considerable gusto preparatory to starting on some eggs. He was not the sort of man, apparently, who permitted anything, even death, to interfere with breakfast.

Even with everyone made acquainted, there was no evidence of sociability. Always excepting the hearty Milton, a stiffness sat on them all. They were all aware, of course, of the death of Captain Snow, and they seemed uneasily conscious of it

in spite of Jack's forced attempt to make them feel at ease.

"You were up early this morning, weren't you, Mr. Milton?" Jack said presently to the tall man.

Milton gulped a piece of toast.

"Eh? Oh, yes. I'm an early riser. I was up before six o'clock."

"You were? Well, you didn't happen to see Captain Snow before he—fell, did you?"

"I certainly did," Milton assured him. "He was pacing up and down the deck there, outside the cabins."

This, Jack thought, might well be the truth. The captain had also been in the habit of arising early and walking the deck.

"Well, now, that's fine," said Jack. "Perhaps you can help me. You see, I have to make a report of it when we reach port. You didn't actually see him fall, did you?"

"No. I was walking, too." Milton was talking readily enough, although apparently irritated a little at having to neglect his food to do so. "I was walking—passed him several times. I was around on the starboard side, I guess, when it happened. At any rate, it was when I came back to the port side there that I heard the sailors calling out, and went and joined them."

Jack was silent a moment. He was getting Milton's story thus publicly because he wanted to watch the others. But they were a strangely silent lot. All of them were listening intently.

"Were any of the rest of you up before seven o'clock?" inquired Jack casually.

Several of them wagged their heads negatively. None of them spoke. Jack waited through a long pause. Then Milton cackled his silly laugh.

"Why, yes," he said. "That man there—Mr. Morris, he said his name was—I saw him out on deck after I first got up."

The big, heavy man in the sport clothes looked up angrily from his bacon. Jack watched him closely.

"Me!" he growled. "Why—well, I guess I did go out kinda early. But I

didn't stay out more'n a minute or so. It was kinda rough, and I went back to bed. Didn't get up again until a few minutes before breakfast."

"I see," said Jack. "You didn't see the captain, did you, Mr. Morris?"

"Naw. I never seen him. I didn't hardly know him. Only time I ever seen him was last night, soon after I come aboard."

"Thank you," said Jack. "It's all right, of course. Just a matter of getting up my report. It doesn't matter—"

"And another thing," put in the helpful Mr. Milton. "That young woman who went up after her sick daddy—she was up early, too."

"She was?" queried Jack.

He should, perhaps, have felt grateful for the help which Milton was so freely offering. But somehow the man irritated him. Perhaps it was the leering way in which he referred to Miss Maple, who had impressed Jack by her apparent sensitiveness and refinement.

"Sure. She was there. I saw her leaning against the rail on the after-deck."

"Thank you," said Jack quietly. "Perhaps she can help me. I'll ask her. When did you see her?"

"Why, I should say it was about five minutes before the sailors found the captain down there on the well-deck," said Milton, grinning, as usual, with no reason.

Jack proceeded with his breakfast and was grateful that none of his guests, not even Mr. Milton, had anything more to say. He was more than ever convinced that the murderer was one of the seven passengers, but so far he had not the slightest idea which of them.

Of all of them, he most disliked the one to whom, it would seem, he owed the most thanks, Milton. Running Milton a close second in Jack's disfavor was the large, hard-looking man in the cheap sport suit, Bill Morris. Also charged against Morris was the fact that, even if he hadn't deliberately lied, he had certainly failed to tell the truth about being on deck early, until forced to do so.

Jack finished rapidly and went back on deck, where the mate, Mattis, reported to him.

"Couldn't find anything in the way of a weapon, sir. And none of the ship's equipment which might have been used is missing, that I know of. How about searching the cabins, sir?"

Jack shook his head.

"If you get a chance to look in any of them without being observed, all right. But we won't make it a thorough search yet. I want them to keep the notion that it was an accident, for a while anyway."

It was a bright, sunny morning of the kind common on the southern California coast. The old ship droned on slowly northward. The passengers seemed as somnolent as the weather. Jack, strolling about during the morning, caught sight of them here and there, usually in singles. They seemed an unsocial lot. And certainly none of them appeared to be acting suspiciously.

Yet Jack was unaccountably disturbed; disturbed, that is, beyond the natural bitterness he felt over the death of Captain Snow. It was a feeling that the murder was not the end of some old trouble, but the beginning of new.

After all, if he could locate the reason for the murder, the identity of the murderer might not be so difficult to determine. But that reason escaped him completely. The thing seemed utterly irrational, yet that there was a reason he was convinced; a very compelling reason.

But the morning dragged on with not even a small development which might have shed some light. He began to look forward to lunch, when he would again have all of his suspects together again. He hoped that somehow, when he had them all under his eye once more, something that someone might say or do—some apparently trivial slip, perhaps—might put him on the right path.

When the gong did sound, however, he again delayed for some ten minutes. And when he got down to the dining saloon they were all there, except one. The missing diner was his most persistent helper, Chester Milton.

Jack ordered chops. The others had all been served and were eating with no more than a little awkward conversation. Jack's

chops were being served when the mild-eyed, little man, Elmer Flower, seated next to Miss Maple, spoke to him, somewhat diffidently.

"I wonder," he suggested, "what is keeping our good friend, Mr. Milton?"

"Oh, I suppose he'll be along pretty soon," Jack said. "He doesn't seem to be the kind to miss any meals."

"Exactly," said Mr. Flower, and proceeded to nibble a cracker.

But fifteen minutes later Milton was still missing, and Jack called old Klitters, the steward, to his side.

"Mr. Milton is probably taking a nap," he said. "Better go up and tell him lunch is served."

Klitters, a man of fifty or more, with a wise, smooth face, who had been stewarding all his life except when detained in port on some minor police charge, grinned knowingly and disappeared up the stairs. He returned in a minute. The grin had faded from his face. He hesitated at the foot of the stairs, and Jack got up and walked over to him—a most unusual thing, perhaps, for the captain of a ship to do.

"Well?"

"That man, Milton, sir, is—is dead!" said Klitters, in a low voice.

## CHAPTER THREE

### NO EVIDENCE

**DEAD?"**

"Yes, sir. Leastwise, he looks like it. Someone must've busted his head in. He's up there in his cabin—number twelve, sir. On the floor, sir."

"Very well." Jack's manner, for the benefit of the passengers, was unconcerned, but his youthful face was set in hard lines. "Go on with the serving, Klitters. Not a word to any of them. Tell 'em Milton wasn't feeling well. And keep your eyes open."

"Yes, sir."

Jack ascended rapidly to the deck, found mate Mattis on the bridge, and together they went to cabin twelve. The man, Milton, was crumpled up on the floor. There was no particular disorder in

the cabin; no sign of a struggle. The man had simply been dealt a terrific blow over the right side of his head, and there he lay, his hair matted in blood. The instrument of death was not there.

Jack and his mate stood and gazed down at the body in silence.

"A powerful blow, sir, it must've been," remarked Mattis.

Jack nodded and got down on his knees. He examined the dead man thoroughly, but there was a mystifying lack of anything that might be regarded as evidence. Someone, it appeared, had entered the cabin without warning, struck Milton one blow with some most efficient weapon and had left. That was all.

Jack and Mattis lifted the body on to the bed.

"We've got to get to the bottom of this, Mr. Mattis," said Jack, his voice sharp with anger.

"Yes, sir."

"There's something strange back of all this. Captain Snow and this man here both killed. They were strangers. So far as we know, at any rate. Yet killed by the same hand. Why?"

"It's mighty puzzling, sir," said the mate, frowning.

"Well, this ends all pretense. We're going after those passengers. At least one of the seven—six, now—is guilty of murder. We'll keep them in the mess room for the time being, while we search the cabins. You get two men to watch them, while I radio back to Pedro."

In a few minutes Jack was down in the mess room, facing six apparently startled passengers. Quietly, he told them of the murder of Milton, and added that Captain Snow's death had been murder, also.

"You are to remain here," he told them. "You understand that a thorough investigation is necessary. I am going through your cabins. I hope there will be no objection."

"You go through my cabin," grumbled the burly Bill Morris, "at your own risk. I don't like it, see? It ain't my fault if people get killed on your old tub."

The large-headed, small-bodied Mr. Flower smiled thinly.

"I think," he said, "the captain is right. After all, he is only doing what circumstances demand that he should do. It's duty, that's all."

Charles Poppy, the little actor, nodded solemnly in agreement.

"It's okey by me," said the good looking young Frank Wethering.

The girl, Grace Maple, and her father were sitting together. The bald-headed, little man's eyes were distinctly troubled, and the girl pressed close to him, as if to give him comfort.

"Why—er—yes," stammered Mr. Maple. "Yes. Of course."

"Thank you," said Jack. "I won't keep you here any longer than necessary."

He left two men with them, with instructions not to let anyone leave for a moment. One of the men guarded the stairway and the other was across the room at the entrance to the galley. The last thing Jack noticed as he walked up the stairs was the curious face of the old steward, Klitters, who was staring at someone seated at the table.

Jack and Mattis went first to the cabin occupied by the actor, Poppy. The cabin was in good order. A cap and a dressing gown were hanging on a hook, a pair of pajamas were folded neatly and laid on the end of the bunk, and there was nothing else in sight except two cheap suitcases.

They opened the suitcases without difficulty. Jack went through the clothing carefully, but found nothing untoward. There were some letters which Jack glanced through, and he gathered from them that Poppy had been down to Hollywood in an attempt to get parts in motion pictures, but had failed and was returning, very low in funds, to San Francisco.

They proceeded then to Bill Morris' cabin. Jack had determined that he would overlook nothing here. Morris had all the earmarks of a tough character, and Jack was not forgetting that he had failed to admit being out on deck early until Milton had told of it. And Milton was now dead.

But Bill Morris' belongings told very

little. He had only one suitcase, and the contents were mostly scattered untidily about the cabin. There was a shirt and an old fashioned suit of underclothes, a couple of old neckties, a soiled pack of cards, a few odds and ends; no magazines, no letters. It was not until Mattis lifted up the mattress on the bunk that anything interesting was discovered.

Under the mattress was a piece of one-inch pipe, about a foot long. . . .

They both stared at it, Mattis with a grin of triumph, Jack with a puzzled frown. Jack covered his fingers with a handkerchief and picked up the pipe very carefully by the middle. He scrutinized it closely. So far as the naked eye could discern, however, there was neither blood nor human hair on either the pipe or on the mattress against which it had been pressed. The pipe was dirty, oily.

"There were several pieces of pipe on the deck forward, sir," said Mattis. "Just lying there. I didn't know how many pieces were there. But that's one of 'em, all right."

Jack made no comment. He took the pipe to his own cabin and then they went on to the cabin of Elmer Flower. Here as Jack had rather expected, were signs of better taste and a more advanced intelligence. There were several magazines of a literary type and a couple of books on numismatics.

Nevertheless, Jack left nothing unturned. Mr. Flower seemed to be somewhat better provided for than most of the passengers. There were a good many clothes, not expensive but new, a portable typewriter, a light collapsible table upon which to set it, and a light folding chair something like a deck chair.

"Numismatics!" murmured Jack. That's something to do with the collection of coins."

And, indeed, it appeared to be a subject in which Mr. Flower was deeply interested, for on the bed was a cardboard box, and when Jack flipped the lid back it proved to be well filled with coins of various kinds.

"Looks like one of these writing guys, sir," the mate commented.

Jack agreed. Next came the cabin of the good looking young man, Frank Wethering. Here they found nothing suspicious, with the exception of a tool-box. Wethering, it appeared, was a carpenter, and he was carrying his tools with him. There were hammers and heavy tools, any of which might be used to deal a death blow, but on none of them was any indication of having been so used.

Jack shook his head dubiously. Wethering did not strike him as a likely suspect, but he finally had Mate Mattis carry the tool-box, also, to his own cabin, and they then visited the cabin of Miss Grace Maple.

It was with some compunction that Jack entered the girl's cabin. He had said scarcely a word to her, nor she to him, yet he had taken a liking to her. But he realized that he had no right to let personal prejudices interfere, and he set about his search just as painstakingly as in the other cabins. Her belongings, it seemed, were pitifully meager. All her clothes appeared to be on her back, judging by the absence of them in the cabin. Just a few odds and ends of wearing apparel and a purse that contained seven dollars and a few cents.

The next cabin was that occupied by the girl's father, Maple. Here, too, there were evidences of poverty; a genteel poverty that was secretly ashamed of itself. A few articles of wearing apparel and an old toilet set in a battered suitcase, and that was all.

With a keen sense of disappointment, Jack sat down in Maple's cabin and put down on a piece of paper the name of each of the passengers, and against each such items of information as might be regarded as even faintly suspicious:

Poppy, the actor: Nothing, except that his cabin was immediately adjoining that of Milton.

Bill Morris: Possession of possible weapon, apparently concealed. Also the fact that he did not admit being on deck before Captain Snow's death until compelled to do so by Milton.

Elmer Flower: Nothing.

Frank Wethering: Possession of possible weapon, not concealed.

Grace Maple: Nothing, unless fact that she was on deck early could be held against her.

Maple, the father: Nothing, except that his cabin was also adjoining that of Milton.

The result was bitterly meagre. Bill Morris still loomed as the most likely suspect, yet Jack knew in his heart that there was not enough to hold him, and he also realized that quite often the guilty was the most innocent in appearance, and the innocent wore, for a time, the brand of guilt.

Mattis was standing, silent but fidgety.

"That man, Morris, sir," he suggested at last, "maybe we ought to put him under lock and key, sir?"

Jack shook his head.

"I wish to God I could put somebody under lock and key. A madman's doing this, Mr. Mattis—a murderous madman. But mad as he is, he's clever, and he's got a mighty good reason for killing. We'll have to keep a sharp eye on things or he'll strike again."

"Yes, sir," said Mattis, dutifully. "But this Morris—"

"Looks like a tough customer, I know. But you never can tell. And we have to watch the company's interests. If we go to locking up innocent people there'd be damage suits and all sorts of trouble."

"Yes, sir. But how about the passengers. They're still—"

"I'll go down and see them. I'd like to question them one by one, but there's not enough to go on yet."

They went down to the dining saloon at once. The six passengers were waiting with apparently very little attempt at conversation, and there was a hush as Jack and Mattis appeared at the foot of the stairs.

"One question," said Jack, after a pause. "I want to find out when Milton was last seen on deck."

"I had a game of pinochle with him in the little card room forward," growled

Morris promptly. "I beat him, too. He didn't like it, and quit about eleven o'clock."

"I saw him walking about the deck after that," put in the mild-mannered Elmer Flower.

There was another pause. And then the girl spoke, in a very low voice.

"I saw Mr. Milton," she said. "It was just a little while before the gong sounded for lunch—about ten minutes, I should say. He was just going into his cabin."

"Thank you," said Jack. "Did anyone else see him?"

No one answered. After all, the girl had timed the killing within a very few minutes; within ten minutes of lunch time, very likely.

"All right," Jack went on. "Now, I'm going to let you all go above. But I warn you to look out for yourselves. There is every indication that a murderer is at large among you. I suggest that you all stick to your cabins closely."

With scarcely a word, the passengers got up and straggled up the stairway. Jack watched them disappear, then he turned to Mattis.

"Keep about the deck as much as you can, Mr. Mattis. See if any of them come out of the cabins. I'm depending upon you."

"Yes, sir." Mattis hesitated respectfully. "But about that man, Morris, sir. I wish—"

"Can't help it," said Jack. "We've got to be mighty careful. But watch him particularly."

"Yes, sir."

The mate went above, and in a little while Jack went to his cabin. He wanted to be alone for a little while, to try to puzzle things out. And the more he thought of it, the more he turned to the opinion that the whole affair had its beginnings years before—something to do, perhaps, with the past history of the *Pacific Beaucon*. His mind groped among the possibilities of this idea for nearly an hour, quite fruitlessly, when he thought of Klitters, the steward.

He recalled that Klitters had been with Captain Snow far longer than anyone else

on the boat—fifteen years, off and on. And abruptly he pressed his call button.

He waited impatiently for what seemed much longer than necessary, but presently an assistant steward appeared at his door, which he had left open. This was a young lad who had made only a few trips on the boat.

"Where's Klitters?" demanded Jack sharply.

"I don't know, sir," said the lad. "Your bell rang, but Klitters wasn't around. I think he answered a call to one of the passenger's cabins, sir. I waited a few moments, and when he didn't show up I thought I'd better—"

"Very well. I want Klitters himself. You can get back."


The young fellow disappeared. Jack's heart sank under the load of a foreboding which he could not shake off. He at once joined Mattis on deck and together they made the rounds.

They found exactly what Jack had expected. Klitters was dead. He had been struck over the head with a heavy instrument which had crushed his skull.

His body was on the floor of the cabin of the little, round-faced man, Maple, the father of the girl!

## CHAPTER FOUR

### REACHING BACK

 OR a little while Jack was struck utterly dumb. The whole situation seemed beyond belief. He had started out as first mate on what he had every right to expect would be the last dull trip of an old time-weary boat destined for the bone-yard. And here he was, master of the boat, which in the morning to follow would nose through the Golden Gate with three dead men aboard.

But he snapped back to attention.

"They're all in their cabins," he muttered hoarsely. "All except Maple. Find Maple, Mr. Mattis!"

"Yes, sir."

The mate, hard and stolid though he was, seemed shaken as he fumbled his way out of the cabin.



Jack stood looking down at old Klitters. There was no question in his mind now but that this thing had its origin years back. He didn't know about the grinning man, Milton, but, so far as Captain Snow and Klitters were concerned, they had died because they had been on the *Pacific Beacon* longer than anyone else. Or so Jack fully believed. He remembered, now, that when he had left the passengers under guard down in the mess room the last thing he saw was Klitters gazing intently at one of them.

But which one?

And what about this apparently inoffensive man, Maple, the father of the girl? Jack had strongly urged all the passengers to remain in their cabins. In making the rounds looking for Klitters he had noted that they had all followed that suggestion—all except Maple.

Very shortly Mattis returned with the man. He stopped with a gasp on the threshold as his eyes fell on the lifeless form of Klitters. His horror seemed real enough, yet Jack was becoming suspicious of everyone now.

"Mr. Maple," Jack said sternly, "what do you know of this?"

Maple sucked his lips before answering.

"Nothing. Nothing, sir," he croaked.

"Nothing? Here's a dead man in your cabin, Mr. Maple. In your cabin, sir! And you claim to know nothing about it. Why did you leave your cabin, in the first place, after I had advised you to remain inside?"

"I—I—well, I am not a well man, captain," Maple said lamely. "I feel much better on deck. And I couldn't see that there was any danger. I—I—"

"Mr. Maple, sir," cut in the mate grimly, "was not on deck. He was in the card room forward."

All the color had left Mr. Maple's face, and his eyes were rolling from one to the other.

"That—that is true, sir. Quite true. I—why, I—my legs got a little tired, so I just stepped into the card room for a rest."

Jack glared at him. The man seemed genuinely scared, but Jack had a definite

feeling that he was lying. And why should he lie, if he wasn't guilty? Yet, here again, Jack realized the lack of tangible evidence. There was no way of proving the lie, and the fact that Klitters was killed in Maple's cabin was not, in itself, evidence that Maple had done it.

"How long is it since you left your cabin?" he queried abruptly.

"Why, about fifteen minutes, I think, sir," said the little man.

"All right. Klitters will have to remain right where he is until we reach port," Jack decided. "You can't very well stay in here, Mr. Maple. You'll have to move to one of the vacant cabins forward. And see that you stay in it!"

"Yes, captain," assented Maple weakly.

"Can I take my—my things?"

"No. Leave them here."

"But—"

"You can't take anything with you," Jack said emphatically.

Mattis led Maple out, and returning a few moments later, he at once began to apologize, diffidently.

"I'm sorry, sir, about Maple getting out of his cabin. I was keeping a pretty close watch about the decks, sir. I don't know how he managed it—must've sneaked out—"

"That's all right, Mr. Mattis." Jack felt rather humbled himself. "There's some mighty clever work going on here. The man who is doing it is mad, but no fool. And there may have been someone else who gave you the slip, too."

"Someone else?"

"Certainly. That is, if Maple is as innocent as he claims to be. Of course, if Maple didn't kill poor old Klitters, someone else did. And that someone else, in that case, slipped out of his own cabin, entered Maple's cabin, rang for Klitters, killed him as he entered and then returned to his own cabin."

"I wonder, sir, if that man Morris—"

"No use wondering," snapped Jack. "We've got to get something definite, something we can lay our hands on. Well, there's nothing for you to do, Mr. Mattis, except to keep on watching. Try to do a little better from now on."

"I will, sir," mumbled the mate, apologetically. "And, begging your pardon, sir, you ought to take care of yourself."

For the first time Jack found something amusing enough to smile at.

"I mean it, sir," said Mattis, in dead earnest. "This damned murderer, sir, is doing for anyone he figures knows anything. And he'll figure you might—"

"Thanks, Mr. Mattis," Jack said good naturedly. "We'll none of us take chances. We can't let up for a minute. No sleep for us tonight. We'll be docking in Frisco by five tomorrow morning, and that's just about daybreak. I take it that a killer as crafty as this one is not anticipating any trouble with the Frisco police."

"Yes, sir," agreed the mate moodily.

They went out and fastened the cabin door. Mattis resumed his alert strolling of the deck. Jack hurried forward to Captain Snow's cabin, let himself in and locked the door.

At one end of the cabin was the captain's desk. There, in the hushed presence of death, Jack seated himself. In the drawers of this desk, Jack knew, Captain Snow had papers and clippings. His great pride in his boat had prompted the old skipper to clip out of the newspapers any small mention of his ship. The captain, in a moment of sociability, had once shown Jack the collection, although Jack, at the time, had not been particularly interested and did not now recall any one item clearly.

Jack forced open the drawers, which was easy, since it was an old desk. He found what he was looking for very quickly; a large scrap book into which the captain had carefully pasted each clipping. With great intentness, Jack proceeded to turn the pages, scrutinizing each item thoroughly.

At a page more than half way through the book he hesitated, put in a marker, and went on. When he had reached the last page he returned to the marker. Here were the only clippings which looked as if they might have a bearing on the murders.

These newspaper clippings all concerned the same affair. They were ap-

proximately eleven years old. Jack read them in detail, then leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes the better to concentrate.

Yet the affair described in the papers seemed a sordid and commonplace enough drama and difficult to link with the killing of Captain Snow. At the time the *Pacific Beacon* had been on the east coast run, from New York to Galveston. Two notorious gem thieves had stolen a necklace worth over a hundred thousand dollars and boarded the *Pacific Beacon* at New York, bound for Galveston.

But the law had caught up with them just as the boat touched Galveston; at least, with one of them. A man by the name of Joe Grand had been nabbed. The second man, whose name was Harry Shipley, was missing, and Joe Grand had finally confessed that Shipley had managed to slip over the side and escape, taking the necklace with him. So far as the clippings went, there was no record of Shipley ever having been apprehended.

The two men who would have been able to recognize either Grand or Shipley—Captain Snow and Klitters—were both dead.

But was either Grand or Shipley aboard the *Pacific Beacon* now? If so, why? Certainly, it was most unlikely that either of them would have borne any sort of a grudge against Captain Snow for eleven years. It was, perhaps, barely possible that Shipley, who had, according to the papers, escaped with the necklace, had taken passage on the *Pacific Beacon* at San Pedro, had been recognized by Captain Snow and Klitters in turn and had killed them both. But that seemed a far-fetched theory to Jack.

His mind groped vaguely about an alternative theory.

And then, after all, the most mystifying feature was the manner of the killings. All three had been killed by a vicious blow over the head with a heavy blunt instrument. But where was the weapon? And what was it? He recalled then that both the pipe which had been found under Morris' mattress and the tools belonging to young Frank Wether-

ing were safe under lock and key when Klitters was killed.

That appeared, on the surface, to exonerate, at least partially, both Morris and Wethering. But did it? Each development seemed only to serve to destroy the few slight clues he already possessed.

Quickly, he again glanced through the clippings, but he found that there was no description of Harry Shipley or Joe Grand, although the latter was referred to as a particularly desperate character.

Suddenly, Jack's train of thought snapped. He sat up rigid. He had heard, faintly but distinctly, the squeak of a shoe outside the cabin, within a few feet of the door—a squeak but no footsteps, indicating that someone was walking on tiptoe. He swung about quietly, faced the door and waited.

There was silence for a few moments, then came a rap on the door. It was a sharp, nervous rap. Jack smiled. He was, he thought, letting his nerves get out of control. For a minute he had expected to meet a marauder, and the marauder had turned out to be merely a visitor, since marauders do not knock on doors.

He reached out and opened the door.

Mr. Elmer Flower, the literary gentleman, stepped in. Mr. Flower's mild blue eyes were calm enough, although the muscles of his face were working in agitation.

## CHAPTER V

### IN MAPLE'S CABIN



“YOU—you don't mind my intruding?” apologized Mr. Flower.

“That's all right,” said Jack. “Just take that chair.”

The chair indicated faced inward, and anyone sitting in it would be almost directly facing the covered body of Captain Snow. Mr. Flower hesitated, then swung the chair around with a pale smile.

“I—I am not exactly nervous,” he apologized, “but—well, this avalanche of murder has rather upset me.”

“I can understand that, Mr. Flower,” Jack said kindly. “Did you wish to see me about something that you have seen?”

“No, sir,” said Mr. Flower slowly. “As a matter of fact, even if I had seen something I might be loath to mention it. I suppose it would be my duty, but it seems to me that under such circumstances one is apt to grow somewhat hysterical, and to see things which don't exist. No. I merely wanted to make a suggestion.”

“All right. Let's hear it.”

Mr. Flower ran a finger through his thin hair in some embarrassment.

“I hope you won't think me presumptuous, sir. But I have been thinking about our predicament. It is not pleasant to be aboard with a murderer as skillful as the one we have. It is a situation which prompts thought, and I—I have conceived an idea.”

“Let's have it,” said Jack tolerantly.

“Very well,” Mr. Flower's manner was diffident, yet eager. “Now, I presume that this murderer has not been carrying on his business without reason. And I take it, also, that he is aware of the danger he will be in with the police when we reach port.”

“I suppose you're right so far,” conceded Jack.

Mr. Flower was acting as a sort of soothing tonic on him. He was more conscious now than ever before of the strain he had been under. He leaned back in his chair.

“Very good,” said Mr. Flower gratefully. “I am reasoning, therefore, that the murderer will have preparations to make—perhaps something to conceal—before we reach San Francisco. It is likely, I should say, that he will make those preparations almost at the last minute, yet leaving himself time to complete them. In other words, during the last hour on board.”

Jack nodded. Mr. Flower's logic was good.

“My suggestion, then, is this. Suppose, captain, that you rout all the passengers out of their cabins, quite without warning, just after entering the Golden Gate? The suddenness and unexpectedness of such a move would be very likely to disclose something, would it not?”

“It sounds plausible,” Jack agreed, smil-

ing. "However, you know I have to be careful about offending passengers."

"Ah! That is true. But surely you could do it on the grounds that it was necessary for their own protection," urged the little man.

Jack pondered a moment.

"Seems like a pretty good idea. I may make use of it. You won't mention it to any of the others, Mr. Flower?"

"Not a word! You may rely on me, captain. I shall be very glad indeed to assist—"

"Thank you."

Mr. Flower got up and, after a moment of hesitation, went to the door. He swung the door open rather weakly, stuck out his head and peaked up and down the deck.

"I'll go with you to your cabin," offered Jack amiably.

"Thank you, sir," beamed Mr. Flower.

"I—I am not exactly nervous, sir, but I—well—"

Jack clapped Mr. Flower encouragingly on the back, stepped out on deck with him and accompanied him to his cabin. Mr. Flower's gratitude was almost pitiful as he disappeared into his cabin and carefully latched his door against intrusion. On his way back to the captain's cabin, Jack met the mate.

"Anything new, Mr. Mattis?" asked Jack.

"No, sir. That is, maybe one thing you ought to know about."

"What's that?"

"That man, Maple, sir. You told him to stay in his cabin. But a few minutes ago I caught him sneaking out on deck again!"

Jack's face set grimly.

"Yes? And what did you do?"

"Slammed him back into his cabin, sir. And told him to stay there."

"All right." Jack was thoughtful. "There's certainly something strange about that fellow. But he doesn't seem inclined to talk. Perhaps we can get something out of that daughter of his. You haven't seen her, have you?"

"No, sir. I think she's staying in her cabin, all right."

"Well, get her and bring her to me."

Jack went to his own cabin and waited. Presently the mate appeared with Miss Maple. The young woman's dark eyes were shadowed with worry. Jack offered her a seat and spoke to her gently, but very seriously.

"I'm sorry to have to do this, Miss Maple, but your father won't talk, so you must."

"Why should my father talk?" the girl challenged, in a low voice. "What has he to talk about?"

Jack's mouth was set in a hard line.

"Miss Maple, three men have been murdered on this boat within the last few hours. Of the five men remaining passengers, one of them is the murderer. I'm compelled to tell you that none of the five has behaved quite as suspiciously as your father."

"I—I don't understand," gasped Miss Maple.

"You don't? I'll make it plain. The last man killed was murdered in your father's cabin. Your father was out on deck when the body was found. He claims to have been out when the murder took place. But he was specifically instructed to remain in his cabin. What reason would he have had for leaving it?"

"He—he is not well. He feels better out on deck."

Jack gazed at her sternly. The reason given no longer convinced him.

"Miss Maple, what is your father's business?"

"He is an accountant."

"In whose employ?"

"Why, he—well, just now he has no position."

Abruptly, Jack again recalled that Maple's face was vaguely familiar. And in his mind that familiarity was now growing more definite.

"It seems to me that I've seen your father before. Or perhaps it was a photograph. Has he, by any chance, had his picture in the papers lately?"

The girl's face perceptibly blanched.

"Perhaps," she whispered.

Jack's fist crashed on his knee.

"Your father's name is not Maple," he

said, memory now functioning fully. "It's Mason. He was mixed up in that investment company crash in Los Angeles, wasn't he? Arrested and charged with embezzlement, wasn't he?"

Miss Maple's shaking hand went to her face, as if to protect herself from a blow. She moistened dry lips.

"It isn't fair!" she cried. "Yes, he was tried, but he was acquitted."

"Yes. But why is he traveling under the name of Maple?"

She did not answer.

"And why does he insist on leaving his cabin when he has been instructed not to?"

Still no answer.

"And why, Miss Maple—or Mason—were you up and on deck before daylight this morning?"

The girl, with an effort, shook off her cringing attitude and sat up in her chair stiffly, defiantly. Her lips remained tightly shut.

"Have you nothing to say, Miss Maple?" insisted Jack.

She shook her head.

"Very well, you may go," Jack snapped.

She got up and walked to the door, the mate going with her. She seemed very frail and helpless, but the attitude of defiance remained with her.

"But don't forget," Jack shot at her, as she stepped out of the cabin, "your refusal to talk will probably result in the arrest of your father for murder!"

She faltered a moment, then disappeared.

Jack spent the rest of the afternoon turning over in his mind every slight detail that had come to his attention. The temporary mental ease he had enjoyed while listening to Mr. Flower's suggestion soon deserted him. The urgent necessity of putting his finger on the killer before reaching port bore him down. The feeling that more trouble was ahead grew until it became an obsession.

Dinner, served at five-thirty, would be the last meal on the *Pacific Beacon* for the passengers, since they would reach San Francisco well before breakfast the next morning. Jack gave orders that each

passenger was to be escorted individually from his cabin to the dining saloon.

A little while before dinner, however, he had called Mattis to him.

"We still don't know enough about these passengers, Mr. Mattis," he said.

"No, sir," agreed the mate. "But I don't see—"

"Nothing is so revealing about people," Jack went on, "as their correspondence."

"Yes, sir. But we looked through their letters when we ransacked the cabins," Mattis pointed out.

"Yes, we did. But often important letters are carried on the person. We have not searched anyone yet."

"Not so easy, sir," said the mate.

"But we'll have to do it," Jack said decisively.

The plan he worked was simple. The dining saloon was downstairs. At the head of the stairs was a small social hall, through which the passengers had to pass before descending the stairs. As each of the passengers, with the exception of Miss Maple, stepped into the social hall he was informed that the dining saloon was well heated so that he would not miss his coat. Each of them was then relieved of his coat and sent down to the dining saloon. No one objected to this procedure very much except the chronic kicker, Morris, and — rather surprisingly — the young carpenter, Wethering.

Wethering had another complaint to register, also.

"How about my tools?" he said, with a touch of anger. "You took 'em from my cabin. I don't care about that, even if it is a crazy idea. But I'll need 'em when I get to Frisco. I won't have any trouble getting 'em back, will I?"

"Probably not," said Jack smoothly. "I'll do the best I can for you, Mr. Wethering."

Jack had two seamen stationed down in the dining saloon as a sort of informal guard. When all the passengers were downstairs he and Mattis went through the coats, extracting such letters as they could find.

There were, as a matter of fact, only two, and both of them disappointing,

although Jack frowned thoughtfully over one of them. The first of them was to Bill Morris, illegibly written. Some woman in Chicago, it seemed, was quite in love with the rough Mr. Morris.

The second was from a man in San Francisco to Wethering, the carpenter. This was the one that interested Jack. It was typewritten, and said:

Dear sir:

I have your wire accepting the job I offered you here. I have arranged transportation for you. You are to take the *Pacific Beacon*, leaving San Pedro at seven o'clock Tuesday evening, the fifteenth. It is important that you take this boat and that you bring your own tools.

Yours truly,

C. Benson.

Jack read it aloud.

"Don't seem like anything much to me, sir," commented Mattis.

"Maybe not," said Jack. But he waited until after dinner, and then got Wethering alone in the social hall and asked him about it.

"What about it?" grumbled Wethering. "This guy Benson just offered me the job and I took it, that's all. I was out of work in Los Angeles and—"

"How did he come to offer you the job?" put in Jack. "Aren't there plenty of carpenters out of work in San Francisco without sending to Los Angeles for one?"

"Sure. But the first letter I got from him said a friend of his that I had worked for recommended me, and he wanted a real good man. He offered me extra good wages if I—"

"Did he mention the name of the friend?"

"Why, no. But—"

"Since you were out of work, I suppose you had advertised in the papers for a job?"

Wethering looked at Jack queerly.

"Sure," he said. "Sure, I advertised."

He seemed unable—or unwilling—to supply any further information, and as

soon as Jack sent him on his way he took Mattis with him to the cabin which had been occupied by Maple before the murder of Klitters. Maple's few belongings were still in there, and Klitters was still crumpled up on the floor.

The mate eyed Jack, obviously puzzled. "Can't help thinking," Jack explained, "that there must be something—something here in this cabin—that we've overlooked. Let's go through every inch of it thoroughly, Mr. Mattis."

And they did; walls, ceiling, fixtures. It was the mate who got the first results. A few slight traces of sawdust on the floor led him to feel up under the toilet cabinet, a spot which was partially concealed. There a space in the wall about a foot square had been skillfully removed with a saw and chisel, and as skillfully replaced.

With a knife, Jack patiently removed the section again. He thrust his hand down in the small dark aperture and felt about for some time, but to no purpose. If anything had been concealed there, it had been taken out.

Jack stepped back.

"There, Mr. Mattis," he said, "is the reason for the murder of our inquisitive friend, Chester Milton!"

"I don't understand, sir," said Mattis. "You mean Milton sawed that hole—"

"No. Our murdering passenger did that, if I'm any judge. But Milton's cabin was adjoining on this side, and Milton probably heard the murderer at work, and, of course, he had to stick his nose in and reveal the fact that he knew something that the murderer certainly didn't want him to know. He was too active for his own good—and it cost him his life."

"But why the hole?"

"I'm beginning to see a little light," Jack said grimly.

They locked the door of the cabin again and started forward.

"It looks, sir, like that little guy Maple is pretty well mixed up in this thing," ventured the mate, who seemed to be switching his suspicions from Bill Morris to Maple in a hurry.

Jack made no response. Suddenly, he

stopped dead, just abreast the foremost cabin.

"My God!" he said solemnly. "What's this?"

He and Mattis both drew near the cabin door. It was the new cabin to which Maple had been assigned. The door was open, and lying across the threshold was Maple himself, quite still.

## CHAPTER SIX

### MISS MAPLE EXPLAINS



ACK was down on his knee instantly. In a moment he looked up.

"Alive!" he said, with fervent relief. "Just stunned, I think. Give me a hand, Mr. Mattis, and we'll put him on his bed."

A little manipulation and some cold water, and Mr. Maple opened his eyes. There was a slight abrasion, Jack had noticed, on the side of the man's head.

"Well," Jack demanded harshly, "what happened to you?"

The little man seemed frightened badly.

"Well, I—I was just stepping out of my cabin," he said meekly. "I had one foot out on the deck when I heard a sort of swish, and something struck me. I—that's all I can recall."

Jack stared at him dubiously.

"You were just stepping out of your cabin?"

"Yes, sir, I—"

"I thought I told you to stay in," Jack roared at him.

"I—I just wanted to step out for a moment," Maple said apologetically. "Just for a moment."

Jack turned to the mate.

"Go get that girl," he snapped.

Mattis went out and returned presently with Miss Maple. Her eyes were wide with wonder and fear.

"You'd better stay here with your father," Jack told her roughly. "There's something funny about you two, and I'm going to get it out of you before I get through. Your father claims to have been hit over the head—"

With a little cry, the girl ran to her

father, sat beside him on the bed. Jack's eyes contracted as he watched the two, and in a moment he turned quickly to Mattis, motioned him to go.

"From now on," he said with slow emphasis, as he followed Mattis out, "perhaps you'll keep your door fastened and stay inside. . . ."

Mattis went with him to the bridge.

"Well, what do you think of it, Mr. Mattis?" queried Jack.

"I dunno, sir," growled Mattis. "It don't look right. Maybe the old fellow faked that—maybe hit his head against something to draw suspicion away from himself."

"Perhaps," said Jack, reflectively. "Either that, or the murderer slipped this time. It's just possible that Maple was telling the truth. The killer may have been just in the act of hitting him as we stepped out of the other cabin. That would have disconcerted him and affected his aim. He could easily have slipped around to port before we could spot him."

"Yes, sir," said Mattis dutifully.

"Anyhow, we know pretty well *why* the murders were committed. Captain Snow, because he recognized a face. Klitters for the same reason. Milton because he heard someone sawing a hole in the cabin wall."

"Yes, sir. It seems that way. But it don't help much."

"With just a little more information it might help a good deal. But it isn't over yet, and won't be until we dock in San Francisco."

"If we only knew, sir, what's back of it—"

"I've got an idea about that, too!"

"You—you have, sir?" said the mate eagerly.

Jack told him of the clippings he had found in Captain Snow's scrapbook.

"You see, according to the newspaper stories, those two crooks, Grand and Shipley, had a fortune in that necklace. Now, Grand was caught, but Shipley is supposed to have made a get-away with the loot. But something else altogether may have happened."



"Something else?"

"Yes. Remember, Grand was reputed to be a desperate character. Suppose that Grand killed his partner, pushed him overboard, and then concealed the necklace on board!"

Mattis drew in his breath.

"Sure, sir," he said admiringly. "That sounds reasonable."

"It's just a theory, of course. But it would fit. Grand, of course, was arrested and sent to the penitentiary for a number of years. It is not unlikely that he was released within the last few weeks. He would have seen in the papers, probably, that this was the last trip of the old boat and would want to make a try for the necklace before it was too late."

"Yes, sir." The mate, usually stolid and unemotional, was almost excited. "That sounds fine, sir. But who can this killer be? There's only Maple, and Bill Morris, and that actor guy, and Mr. Flower, and the young fellow Wethering. Right now it looks bad for Maple, but that Bill Morris—"

"Morris looks like a hard customer," admitted Jack. "And he did try to avoid admitting he was up on deck early this morning. He has all the earmarks of a petty crook, and if he is he would deny everything on general principles, if he could get away with it."

"Maybe so, sir. Well, there's—"

"Better get around the decks, Mr. Mattis," Jack cut in briskly. "It looks like a bad night. We can't afford to let up for a minute."

"Very well, sir."

Jack watched the mate descend the companionway and disappear in the darkness. It was, indeed, a bad night, in its physical aspects as well as in its possibilities for evil. The *Pacific Beacon*, plowing cautiously northward, was now enveloped in a clammy, chill fog. A cold night for dead men, Jack thought. He had to fight to keep himself from being unbearably depressed. Even so, his mind insistently brooded over the strange and tragic situation in which he found himself.

Master of a ship for the first time in

his life! And that ship on its last trip, with three dead men aboard, and their murderer still at large.

For hours Jack trudged wearily up and down the bridge. From here he could see, every few moments, the decks on both sides. Occasionally he caught a vague glimpse of the plodding but determined Mattis, making his interminable rounds. There was no sign of any passengers. Surely, none of them would venture out—unless it was the murderer himself.

At a little before midnight Jack was standing at the starboard end of the bridge, leaning against the rail. Suddenly his alert ears caught the sound of footsteps, very light and a little unsteady. He swung about and faced toward the companionway. In a moment a form shaped vaguely in the fog, coming toward the companionway, then mounting the steps. Jack's hand stole toward his pocket, in which he was carrying a revolver.

The form grew more distinct, was revealed by the light on the bridge as it reached the upper steps.

Jack stared incredulously.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded sternly.

"I—I had to tell you something," faltered Miss Maple.

Jack led her back to the little chart room and sat her down.

"You should have stayed in your cabin," he said, not unkindly. "There's danger out on those decks."

"I had to tell you something," the girl insisted dully. "Something about my father."

"The truth?" queried Jack sceptically.

"The truth," she said. "I might not have told you but for the attempt on his life. The instructions to tell no one were so specific—"

"What instructions?"

"The instructions of the man who hired him." The girl paused and gazed at Jack as if she were afraid she might not be believed. "I know this sounds rather fantastic. But you must consider our position. You know about my father's trial. He was innocent, and was found so by the jury. But the trial broke him physi-

cally and left us absolutely destitute. In addition, my mother is seriously ill—a permanent invalid, in a hospital—and we needed money desperately—more desperately than I—”

“All right. But about this man you claim hired your father?”

“I—we don’t know him. He evidently knew of father’s urgent need, and he wrote from San Francisco offering him a job.”

“From San Francisco?”

Jack’s eagerness startled her.

“Yes. He offered father a job in San Francisco and arranged transportation. The salary was to be far higher than father could have expected. We got the tickets at the steamship office at the dock. Apparently, he had bought our tickets with the specific understanding that father was to have a certain cabin.”

“Yes? Were there any strings attached to this—”

“That was the one peculiar feature about it.” The girl’s voice was husky with excitement. “Father’s employer said that there would be a man named Morris on board—”

“Bill Morris?”

The girl nodded.

“And father was to watch him constantly and report his actions when he got to San Francisco. The instructions were specific. Father was to be out on deck a large part of the time and the periods were definitely mentioned. If he failed in this, or mentioned it to anyone, he lost the position!”

“And that’s why your father insisted on going out on deck in spite of my orders?”

“Of course. And that is why I was on deck early in the morning. Dad was feeling very badly, and I persuaded him to let me take his place, just for the period before breakfast.”

“Have you the letters from this man to your father?”

“Not here. They’re in with some things which we expressed to San Francisco.”

“What else do you know?”

“That is all.” She looked at him in keen anxiety. “Do you think all this has

anything to do with these—these murders?”

“I think it very likely.” Jack had been talking in a hard, brisk voice. Suddenly he smiled at her reassuringly and spoke in a more friendly tone. “Thank you very much, Miss Maple. It may turn out that you have helped me a great deal. Now I’m going to take you back to your father’s cabin, and under no circumstances must you leave it or let anyone in, until I give the word.”

After escorting the girl to her cabin, Jack found Mattis at once. He had got into the habit of repeating almost everything to the mate; the repetition seemed to help clarify details in his own mind. He told Mattis about the girl.

“So Maple claims he was watching Bill Morris, sir?” said the mate. “Ain’t that funny? It’s kinda hard to figure out. Harder than ever—”

“On the other hand,” said Jack, “we’ve learned something more.”

“We have, sir?”

“Well, we know why these murders were committed. We have a pretty good theory as to who committed them—that is, that we’ve got a desperate ex-convict by the name of Joe Grand aboard. Now, Miss Maple’s story seems to me to connect up with that letter of Wethering’s, the carpenter.”

Mattis, however, shook his head. He was completely mystified.

“It seems to me,” Jack went on, “that this is about as elaborately planned a bit of work as I’ve ever run up against. The man who committed these murders went to extreme lengths to avoid suspicion while he was on board. Of course, it’s apparent that he did foresee the necessity of murder, and prepared for it.”

“But Wethering, sir, and Maple—”

“Wethering is a carpenter. Someone unknown hired him to go to San Francisco on this boat and insisted he bring his tools with him. The killer knew that he would need carpenter’s tools to make that hole in the cabin wall, but he wouldn’t run the risk of carrying any himself. That’s the reason for Wethering.”

"Sounds likely," agreed the mate. "But what about Maple—"

"A very clever piece of work, hiring Maple, although a little too daring. The same man, no doubt, hired Maple as hired Wethering. Now, if it is really Joe Grand that we are up against, we've got something to go on, for Grand would undoubtedly know what cabin the necklace was concealed in. He specified that Maple was to have that cabin, rather than himself, so that if evidence of tampering with the wall was discovered suspicion would fall on Maple, not on himself. Maple was instructed to stay out on deck, for the ostensible purpose of watching Bill Morris, but really so that the way would be clear for the murderer to go into the cabin conveniently when he wanted to."

Mattis whistled softly.

"A great scheme, sir," he commented.

"Yes. Now there's not much time left. Mr. Mattis. Anything may happen between here and San Francisco. We're up against a man as wily as he is crazy, and as ruthless. Mr. Flower proposed a good scheme to me, and I think I'll go and talk to him for a minute—if I can rouse him without scaring him to death."

Jack sent Mattis back to his watching, warning him to beware of every shadow. Before he called on Mr. Flower, however, he sent another radio message, this time to the local manager of the steamship company in San Pedro at his home, thus making sure that it would get immediate attention. The message read:

PASSENGERS CLAIM PARTY OR PARTIES IN SAN FRANCISCO ARRANGED PASSAGE FOR THEM. SEND ME NAMES OF ALL SUCH PASSENGERS. NEED THIS INFORMATION BEFORE REACHING SAN FRANCISCO.

Mr. Flower, he found, was not asleep. He was lying on his bunk with an open book relating to his favorite passion of numismatics, studying a page of illustrations of unique coins. He let Jack in promptly, and indeed seemed relieved to have him about.

Jack moved Mr. Flower's personal deck chair over near the bed and sat down on it.

"It's rather late, isn't it, to be sitting up reading, Mr. Flower?"

Mr. Flower smiled back at him and lifted an eyebrow.

"Well, you see, I'm not exactly nervous, but with this man-killer aboard—"

"He wasn't going to catch you napping, eh? Good idea. Well, I just wanted to tell you that I'm about decided to use your suggestion."

"Splendid, sir! Splendid!" Then Mr. Flower grew thoughtful. "However, it should be done—pardon me if I appear presumptuous—it should be done very carefully. That is, in such a way as not to make it possible for the murderer to attack any of the rest of the passengers."

"There is grave danger there," Jack admitted gravely. "But we'll have to take a chance on it. Of course, if you have any suggestions that will make for the safety of the passengers, I'll be—"

"I don't know," said the little man, knitting his brows. "I presume it would be better for them all to gather in the social hall. One at a time would be best, so that you can have your men escort them individually. It wouldn't take long."

"That sounds all right." Jack got up to go. "By the way, Mr. Flower, you haven't noticed your fellow passenger, Bill Morris, up to anything strange, have you?"

Mr. Flower shook his head negatively.

"Nor the actor, Poppy?"

"Not at all, sir," admitted Mr. Flower meekly. "You see, their cabins are both on the other side. And, in any case—while I'm not exactly nervous—I've kept pretty close to my own cabin."

Jack left him and went back on the bridge. Three hours more and the *Pacific Beacon* would be in San Francisco Bay. What might happen in those three hours? What would Mr. Flower's scheme uncover? Would the murderer strike again? Three dead men, Jack thought, were enough.

The sea was choppy, the fog thicker than ever, and the old boat jostled along

like a weary and unsteady old woman trying to get somewhere in a hurry. Three hours more and she would come to rest in San Francisco Bay, her days of service over. But for those three hours she groaned on through the fog as if protesting in creaking, wailing tones the disgrace which had been put upon her in the last hours of her life.

For those three hours Jack watched and listened and waited, tense and wary. The boat was nosing cautiously in through the Golden Gate when Mattis joined him on the bridge.

"Well, Mr. Mattis?" said Jack, in a hoarse whisper.

"Nothing to report, sir," said the mate gloomily.

Jack stared ahead. The waters of the Gate were rough, and the old boat pitched and tossed, yet somehow all seemed very quiet and still. Eight bells had been tolled some time ago. Jack looked at his watch. It was twenty minutes after four.

"Three dead men aboard, sir!" muttered Mattis. It had been a hard night for him, too, and he was showing the strain. "It's like as if this damned fog was hiding everything from us."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE MURDERER STRIKES



ACK was silent for a little while. "Mr. Mattis," he said presently, "in twenty minutes we're going to have a little meeting aboard."

"A—a meeting?"

"Yes. It's Mr. Flower's idea, and a good one. In twenty minutes each of the passengers is to be aroused and told to come at once to the social hall. You attend to that, Mr. Mattis."

"Yes, sir."

"In forty minutes we'll be tying up." Jack's face showed drawn and white in the dim light on the bridge. "There'll be things happening, Mr. Mattis, in those forty minutes."

"Yes, sir," said the mate with puzzled humility.

"See that the passengers come to the social hall immediately they are roused.

Permit no stalling. Everyone is to be present by twenty minutes to five."

"Yes, sir."

Mattis lumbered away down the companionway. Jack spent a few minutes pacing slowly up and down the bridge. Presently the fog thinned out as they edged south and began to slide along within a few hundred yards of the first docks. Early though it was, there came across the still air the rumble of a truck crunching along the Embarcadero.

Presently he was aware of shuffling movements down on the decks below. Mattis was busy at his task of rounding up the passengers. Jack wanted them all to be gathered together before he appeared. A little later he looked at his watch. It was twenty minutes to five.

He walked slowly down the companionway. His heart was pounding, but his step was resolute. In his mind was the thought that success or failure would greet him definitely within the next five minutes. Many of his ideas had crystallized during the chill, damp hours of the night, but the final plans of the murderer were still mere surmise, so far as Jack was concerned.

By this time the passengers should all be assembled. He reached the door of the social hall just as Mattis, looking worried, stepped toward it from inside.

"Bill Morris, sir," he said, "is dead drunk. Been drinking all night. He ain't here yet. I sent two of the men around to carry him here."

Jack nodded dubiously. Mr. Elmer Flower came to the door and smiled brightly.

"If you don't mind," he said, "I think I'll go and get my overcoat. It's frightfully cold. And, now that everyone is brought together, I'm really not in the least nervous."

Jack watched him trot away up the deck and was about to step quickly inside when a man came up and handed him a radio message from San Pedro:

PASSAGE FOR MAPLE WETHERING  
AND MORRIS ALL BOOKED BY SAN  
FRANCISCO

Jack permitted Mattis to glance at the message.

"Morris!" repeated the mate, as if a suspicion of his had been confirmed.

Jack said nothing. He entered the social hall, glanced sharply about. The actor, Poppy, was there, and Wethering, and Maple. Jack noted at once, however, that Miss Maple was absent.

"Where is your daughter?" he demanded of Maple.

"Why, she should be here any minute, sir," said the little man. "She went to her cabin."

"Her own cabin?"

"Yes, sir. Of course, she spent the night with me, in my cabin, as you suggested. But she needed a wrap, I believe, so she—"

"She went to her own cabin?" Jack's voice was sharp and hoarse.

"Y-yes, sir?" said Maple, startled. "But she—"

Jack turned and flashed like lightning to the door. He felt numb and heavy with a sudden dread, but he moved swiftly and noiselessly toward the girl's cabin as he had never moved before. He thought he had been taking no chances, but this one little detail he had overlooked. Somehow it had never occurred to him.

The girl's door was closed. But through the half-open porthole he caught a quick glimpse of the scene within. The girl was bent over something on the bed. Standing behind her was the figure of a man, outlined clearly enough in the faint light burning in the cabin. The man's hand was drawn backward. In his hand was what appeared to be a round ball, fastened to the end of some cords.

The man's hand was moving!

With a cry that choked in his throat, Jack hurled himself at the door, flung it open. The ball was already in the air, as is poised before its swift descent. Jack leaped, crashed wildly against the man, flung him with terrific force against the bedpost.

The man grunted, lay still.

Jack, half stunned himself struggled to his feet. The girl was staring at them.

"Why did you let him in here?" Jack asked the girl.

"He—he seemed very pleasant and harmless," she murmured. "He merely offered to help me with my wrap."

THE *Pacific Beacon* was swinging slowly in toward her dock for the last time. Nearby could be heard the chug-chug-chug of a motor boat, cruising about in leisurely fashion. Captain Jack Cobb was back on the bridge. In his pocket was a necklace representing a fortune. In his hand was the weapon which had killed three men.

Mate Mattis came up to report.

"He won't get away now, sir," he said, with a trace of a grin. "And you should hear him cussing!"

Jack did not answer. In the first faint light of the coming dawn he was watching two figures pacing slowly up and down the deck: a weary, broken little man and a young woman.

"But I sure had that guy Morris picked," Mattis went on. "When you got that cable saying Morris' passage was booked from Frisco, too—"

"That cleared Morris, instead of incriminating him," Jack put in. "It was part of Flower's—or Joe Grand's—wily scheme. Flower undoubtedly induced Morris to come to Frisco, too, the same as he did the others. The fact that Morris is probably some kind of a crook made it all the better. Morris would keep his mouth shut to the last minute. Incidentally, the pipe under his mattress was undoubtedly planted."

"Yes, sir, I suppose so. And that—that thing is what he used to—"

"That's the weapon, and a very effective one. I suspected that when I sat down on his private deck chair in his cabin. It had a canvas seat, fastened to the wood support by a strong cord. When I sat down on it my fingers slid beneath it and the under side felt smooth, like oilcloth.

"Well, his trick was really simple. He would pour all his so-called ancient coins, which are mostly worthless, on to the seat of the chair. Then he would unfasten the

canvas and draw it up into a sort of bag, very tightly, so that he had what was just about as hard and solid as a ball of metal. A little of the cord remained free, like a handle. A small man like Flower often has a good deal of strength in forearm and wrist."

"And the outside of the ball, sir, is—"

"Yes. The under-side of the chair seat would be the outside of the ball, and he had fastened a sort of oilcloth to it, so that all he had to do was go back in his cabin and wash off any hair or blood that might have stuck to it."

"Pretty slick, sir. But I don't understand how he could figure on getting through the Frisco police. They'd hold everybody, wouldn't they, maybe take their fingerprints—"

"He didn't expect to meet the police at all," said Jack. "It would be easy enough to drop off the boat here and be picked up by a boat he could have arranged for. I wouldn't be surprised if that motorboat we can hear is the one. His accomplice is probably wondering why Flower hasn't shown up."

"Sure, sir, sure." The mate's admiration was increasing. "But why did he suggest that meeting in the social hall?"

"Well, I made a good guess at that not long ago. I forgot one thing that nearly did for Miss Maple. I forgot that she might want to go in there herself."

"A guess, sir?"

"Yes. My guess was that Flower had

hidden the necklace, late yesterday, in someone else's cabin, so that he would be in the clear if we searched the cabins. So he made what looked like a very good suggestion. His idea was that if everyone were called out of their cabins he could make some excuse and step out and get the necklace easily, then drop over the side."

"So he chose the young lady's cabin, sir?"

"Naturally. Of all the cabins, that was the least likely to be the object of a thorough search."

The *Pacific Beacon* was beginning to nestle awkwardly against the dock. On the dock, in the first dull glimmerings of daylight, were several waiting figures, doubtless police and anxious company officials. Jack paid scant attention to them. He turned abruptly and walked down to the deck, approached Mr. Maple and his daughter.

"I should think, Mr. Maple," he said pleasantly, "that the company might be willing to recompense you a little for that blow on the head."

"Really," said the little man, "I couldn't—"

"And as for you, Miss Maple," Jack turned to the girl, "I'm afraid I was pretty rough with you. I'll have to try to work out some way of squaring accounts—if I may—"

"Thank you," she said, and there was understanding in her smile.

(The End.)

# The Green Monster

## A TALE OF YOUNG LOVE BELOW THE RIO GRANDE

By  
RUTH MOORE MORRISS

*Frontispiece by*  
STEPHEN WAITE



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*So David and Anne sat alone at a green iron table in a lantern-lit patio and a stringed orchestra played love songs. . . . Were there always orchestras in Mexico, Anne wondered, who, for a small coin, could turn your heart inside out? (Page 86.)*



# THE GREEN MONSTER

## CHAPTER ONE

### TRANSITION

**T**HERE'S one more thing, Miss Ott." He was a broad-faced man with a heavy watch chain and a genial outlook on life, this representative of the mining company, at one of whose camps Anne Ott was going to teach school. After the first ten minutes she had not been afraid of him, and Anne Ott was usually afraid of people for a much longer period than ten minutes. But at his next words she positively trembled.

"There's one more thing, Miss Ott," he repeated. "We want you to take the Green Monster with you when you go down to Santa Cruz."

The Green Monster! Good gracious, what could that be? Anne Ott, being Connecticut born and quietly reared, considered that going into Mexico was going into an uncharted wilderness. Still, she had not expected green monsters so soon. This was only the border, and the American side at that.

The man across the desk from her saw her consternation and laughed. His laugh came easily and was reassuring. He was used to chaperoning unaccustomed American women on their way to husbands and fathers, or fiancés, in the mines in

Mexico. "It's not as bad as all that. The Green Monster is—well, I'll show it to you."

Nevertheless, Anne did not like the caution which made him close the transom as well as the door into the hall. Then he opened the safe behind him and brought out a small, green, leather-covered box. "Isn't that a daisy?"

Winking in front of Anne was one of the largest emeralds she had ever seen, set with square cut diamonds. "Here, let's see if it fits."

Anne drew back. "I don't have to wear it do I?" She had never owned any jewelry except an old amethyst brooch and a pair of pearl earrings of her grandmother's. She had never had any particular fondness for jewelry, and she thought with horror of this green stone that winked so balefully in its glittering diamond nest.

The manager of the Mexican mining department laughed at her again. "There's nothing wrong with it. Three carats of pure emerald, as good as they come. The only reason we call it the Green Monster is because it's been so much trouble to us. This ring had been traveling back and forth between here and Santa Cruz for the last three months.

"The young lady who is to wear it as an engagement ring is—ahem—well, somewhat peculiar. She didn't care for

the setting, so it has had to be changed twice to suit her. That's why this office appears to be in the jewelry business. The last time her future husband was up here, the ring was ready but he forgot it."

"Forgot it!" echoed Anne. "How could anyone forget such a thing?" She shuddered.

"Well, geniuses do forget—and he's a genius, but I expect it will be safe enough with you. A little loose on the finger, but it fits. Now when you go through the customs, don't mention it. They will consider it your personal jewelry."

Anne had read stories of jewels being smuggled through the customs and all the disasters that resulted therefrom, but she couldn't refuse to take it. She couldn't refuse anything within reason until she had made good on her job.

She had used the last cent of her savings to come to the border, and the company were paying her expenses the rest of the way. If they had asked her to feed a green elephant in the baggage car she felt that she would have had to do it.

"What will they do if they find it?" Anne asked.

"They won't find it," he told her crisply, "if you keep your gloves on and your mouth closed. If they should, nothing particularly serious would happen. The ring has already gone in and out of Mexico. It would simply mean endless red tape and explanation to get it back in now, so I don't want to trust it to the mails or express. And if anything should happen on the other side, you can call on Scotti. I've told him to look out for you. He's going down on the same train."

Anne's eyes lighted up. They were blue, nice eyes, but so shy that they scuttled behind her smoke-colored lashes at the sight of a stranger. "Well, then when this Mr. Scotti comes up I can give it to him!"

The manager laughed even more heartily than before. "Give it to Scotti? That's a good one. He'd probably lose it in a poker game before the train is ten miles out of Juarez. Don't even show it to

him unless you get into trouble—and you won't. Keep the stone turned to the inside of your palm, and when you get to Santa Cruz deliver it personally to David Milne." He wrote the name on a card. "Be sure it's Milne and nobody else, and don't worry. The stone's insured."

But Anne did worry. As the train crawled across the bridge over the sluggish Rio Grande, she felt the lump under her glove and was convinced that, potentially at least, she was a smuggler. This slow, brown river was the dividing line between her country and that alien one where she was to make her home for so many unknown months.

A little man, with eyes and yellow teeth like a rat, appeared at the entrance of the Pullman, apparently from nowhere. He was demanding something from the passengers. Anne's frightened eyes saw that what he wanted was only passports.

Another man, a tall, lean dandy with black mustaches, slid in from the other end of the Pullman. Suitcases were pulled off racks at his appearance. He rummaged through them superciliously, as one who had seen too many intimate garments to be interested. He poked at the crackling paper bags which the Mexican travelers seemed to consider to be necessary impedimenta of a journey.

He flicked a cigarette ash here, he flicked a cigarette ash there. He engaged in a voluble discussion with a matron of his own nationality, which seemed not to result too well for the matron, although Anne could not understand a word of it.

Why didn't he come to her seat and get the ordeal over with? Her bag was down, and she remembered guiltily that she had bought one new slip and three pairs of stockings. The American manager had said that would be all right. He had also said that the ring would be all right, but she felt that it shone like a headlight through her glove.

The dandy with the mustaches was standing over her. Probably he had been warned that she carried illicit jewels. The customs had ways of finding those things

out, she had always understood. He lighted a fresh cigarette. The odor of it was sweet and sickening. Anne thought she was going to faint. She tugged her neat, washable chamois gloves an inch further up on her wrists.

Then the villain smiled. He gestured toward her modest suitcase. "Is that all?" he asked, surprisingly enough in English. Anne managed to nod.

Anne was not a coward, but she was afraid of people and things she did not understand. Except for Connecticut and one brief student trip to Europe, the world was exactly as uncharted for her as it had been for Columbus. Her grandmother's white frame house with the lilac trees and the forsythia in the spring. A public day-school and then a small nearby girl's college.

Her grandmother had been dead now for two years, and Anne had lived at the girl's school where she taught—well, anything and everything—being the youngest of the staff and easily imposed upon. Overwork, undernourishment—the harsh head of the school provided Spartan meals for her staff.

Flu, pneumonia at the beginning of a New England winter, and the grave old doctor who had taken care of her grandmother had warned Anne that if she did not get to a warmer climate, a dry climate, he added portentously, she might end her life in a sanatorium. No, there was nothing wrong with her lungs. But they were weak. One more cold—

The chance to finish the second term in a mining camp in Western Mexico where the sun would shine perpetually—from now until the rainy season began in July, where there were less than a dozen children, all under fourteen—had seemed like an intervention of Providence.

Anne had wired her acceptance; handed her resignation to the disapproving Miss Minton, who thought that Mexico was a country of revolutions and mountain lions; drawn exactly one hundred and eighty-six dollars out of the bank, and here she was—first crossing the Rio Grande and now in the middle of a Mexican custom house.

It was exactly like a life-sized marionette show with all the marionettes in the center of the stage and in full voice. An American woman with two airedales and a twang in her voice was protesting that she wouldn't pay duty on a victrola. Porters in leather aprons were dumping trunks on the floor. Inspectors were gesticulating for keys.

They were going through Anne's trunk now, rattling the tissue paper with which she had so carefully packed her few clothes, disarranging everything, putting the electric iron back on top of her one blue taffeta evening dress. Oh, dear, would they ever finish? They'd probably ask to see the fillings in her teeth next—and her hands—which hid the Green Monster!

But the trunk still engaged their attention. Probably because they had found nothing dutiable, they supposed there must be something. Two pairs of walking shoes, her one pair of slippers, were piled on the dusty cement floor beside her alarm clock, and then at the bottom of the trunk one of the inspectors came across the yards and yards of that creamy white velvet that had been her grandmother's wedding dress.

There had been no reason for her to bring such a thing along, except that there was no place to leave it, and Anne felt that it was her last link with her family and her past, the only lares and penates she possessed.

The inspector pounced on it, shook it out. "Ah," he exclaimed balefully.

What he might have done then Anne had no idea. If he had asked her to pay duty she would have had to give him the dress. But she felt a hand on her shoulder and a drawling voice said. "I'll handle this for you, if you'll let me, Miss Ott."

"Antique," he announced to the inspector. "*Muy antigua*, more than a hundred years old! Have a cigar, Pancho, and let Miss Ott pack her trunk. What did you think you'd found, a new Paris dress?"

"Ah, Señor Scotti." The inspector was smiling now. He bowed to Anne. He

accepted the cigar. He patted Scotti on his broad back.

"*Mi amigo*," he kept saying—whatever that meant.

"You bet I'm your *amigo*, and don't you forget it! This little lady's coming down to teach school for us."

Whereupon there was more back-patting and handshaking. Thank heaven she had the ring on her left hand!

"Lock up the trunk, kid, and that big boy in the leather apron will tote it back to the baggage car. Hi, *corredor*, you!" Scotti slipped him one of the heavy silver pesos that changed hands so rapidly in the customs shed. "Now we'll walk up and down and see if we can find some beer. It will be a good half hour before the train gets under way."

Anne had never walked up and down a station platform before with an escort quite as ferocious as Scotti. He looked like a swallow eagle with a broken beak, and he wore his broad, black felt hat as near over one ear as he could manage it. But his drawl was nice—even if she couldn't show him the ring.

It was not until two hours out of Juarez that even Scotti managed to discover beer. By that time he had discovered two other mining men and they asked Anne to join them with a bottle. She could imagine Miss Minton's outraged sensibilities. At any other time her own would have been outraged.

They treated her, however, not as a woman, but as a companion, a traveling American who was a stranger here.

"You see those hills over there?" One of them pointed a stubby finger toward the blue mountains on the horizon—hills, he called them! "That's where the Eruption was found. Greatest bonanza in the last hundred years." Then they forgot her to discuss the bonanza which had made a million for some prospector who had won it in a lottery.

"Now go on and drink your beer, Miss Ott," Scotti was telling her. "You won't like it at first. The ladies never do, but the drinking water on this train ain't safe. Did you get an inoculation for typhoid?" She hadn't. "Well then, you

go and see the doc as soon as you get to camp. I know what I'm talking about. Even if you was safe from the typhoid, you can't tackle the water. That's the girl. Try another sip. Bitter, but tomorrow morning when they pull you out at Jimenez, you'll be glad to have a bottle of beer and some of the chink's *huevos rancheros*—eggs nested up in green chili," he explained.

The next morning at five o'clock when the porter boomed a combination of Spanish and English in her ear, none of which made sense except Jimenez, she remembered what Scotti had said.

The night before, the mountains had disappeared in the most brilliant sunset she had ever seen. The curtains had been pulled on a gray purple dusk. "So nobody will shoot in at the lights," Scotti had said. Supper. Tinned soup and tinned Boston brown bread.

And now Jimenez. The porter went through the car, singing as if it had been a refrain, "*Ji-me-nez, Ji-me-nez*." Then a dark station and torches. Somehow Scotti was by her shoulder.

"We'll go over to Dona Luisa's. The company has a room there and we can clean up." Dona Luisa, he went on to tell her, was an Englishwoman who, for nearly a century, had run an inn in this forsaken place and finally, because she alone had been able to subdue the great bandit, Pancho Villa, into comparative peace while he was in her house, she would go down in history.

Anne forgot about the Green Monster; forgot that she was going into a strange land, of necessity; forgot that Scotti cheated at cards and had once killed a sheriff in a good-natured row—he had admitted as much on the train. She realized only that the dawn was breaking by torch light, that here in a group of whitewashed huts, an Englishwoman, little and old and dried up, as Scotti had described her, had made history. Made it in a place where there were no bath tubs and you drank beer for breakfast.

Somehow Anne decided she was doing to like this amazing country. Perhaps there was a place for a school teacher,

whose constitution wasn't strong enough for the Miss Mintons of the world.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE LAND OF TOMORROW



IMINEZ was not a destination. It was simply the place, Anne learned, where one changed from the green plush-seated Pullman to the wooden-benched local which would take them to camp. The local came in with daylight, and after innumerable delays and conferences between the conductor and the engineer, they were off, rattling between the mesquite bushes toward Parral.

Sleepy as she was from crawling out of her berth at five o'clock, everything interested Anne. The wide hats of the men, the black shawls of the women, an officer wrapped in his cloak like a figure out of Italian opera, a parrot chattering in his cage while a small boy fed him bits of banana.

Then the low, flat-roofed houses of Parral glittering in the hot sunlight. Hot sunlight in February, it was incredible, and a town that might have come out of Arabian Nights. Anne half expected Ali Baba to get on the train, or Aladdin to smuggle his old brass lamp past the conductor. Mañana land. The land of tomorrow—or yesterday.

Scotti laughed at her excitement. "Parral ain't nothing to speak of. None of these northwestern Mexican towns are. Wait till you go down south. That's where they wear all the colors. That's where the money's been spent on churches and theaters. Take Mexico City. There's a pip for you."

Anne didn't tell him that she would be lucky if she saved up enough money to get back to Connecticut; that as far as she was concerned, Mexico City was as out of the question as Bagdad. For the moment Parral was her dream.

"How far is the camp from here, Mr. Scotti? Could I come over sometime and see Parral?"

"Sure. It's twenty miles as the crow flies. All the ladies come down here

shopping. The Supe's daughter drives over about once a week, I guess."

He was suddenly enthusiastic. "Gee, Miss Ott, wait till you see her! Some looker. The boys all fall for her. I was kind of off my head about her once myself." He sighed, reminiscently. "But that's all over now. She'll be gettin' hitched pretty soon, I guess."

"Hitched?" Anne inquired.

"Yep. Married. And Miss Norcross is getting a fine feller, too. Don't let no one tell you different. I thought he was a sissy when he first come into the mill, but he ain't! Not old Dave!"

Old Dave! Connie felt the ring under her glove. Much as she had come to rely on Scotti, she remembered the warning she had been given, and she had kept her hands faithfully gloved, except at breakfast, when her right hand had done duty for two and her left had stayed in her lap.

He must mean David Milne. And the girl who was going to wear this ring then was the superintendent's daughter. Well, whatever Scotti thought about her, Anne had her own opinions about any girl who would want the Green Monster.

The twenty miles as the crow flies were not accomplished with any celerity by the Mexican local. They crawled up and up through bare brown hills. They stopped for an unruly herd of short-horned goats.

And finally they drew up at a station that was no station at all, but a cross-roads, where a tall man on horseback lounged in his silver-mounted saddle until the mail was handed to him and then jabbed the animal with heavy spurs until he wheeled through the air in an arc.

But the slow miles gave Scotti a chance to speak what was on his mind. "Look here," he said, chewing his cigar. "You ain't never lived in a mining camp have you? That's what I thought. Well, then, you won't get mad if I butt into what ain't my business, will you?"

"It's like this. Mining camps are funny places. I was born in one out in Arizona. I guess I know all there is to know about them. It's the ladies that cause the

trouble. Yes, ma'am, and the sooner you find that out the less trouble you'll be in.

"Down here in Mexico they all got servant girls—*criadas*—to do the work for them. They don't have to stand over the wash tub and they don't have to take care of their kids. Well, a lot of them ain't used to that kind of a life. So they got to do something, and they put their heads together and cause trouble."

"Trouble?" Scotti's version of life in a mining camp did not sound reassuring.

"You bet. Plenty of it. Each one wants to give the biggest parties, and be in with the ones at the top."

"How silly!" It did sound silly to a mouselike school teacher who had never known the desire for social prestige.

"Maybe so, but don't you join any gang until you know what gang you're joinin', and don't go makin' enemies if you can help it. I guess you ain't the kind to run after men, so you won't get in trouble that way. But if you don't like one of the ladies, don't mention it even when you say your prayers at night. That is, if you want to keep your job."

Anne felt more and more that she was coming into an existence which had no place outside the covers of a book. Scotti, looking like a human eagle, chewing on a cigar and telling her not to mention it, even in her prayers, if she took a dislike to any of the camp inhabitants.

The man who had wheeled his horse and ridden away with a flourish and clank of silver. The mysterious town of Parral. The high, exhilarating mountain air that made her hungrier than she ever remembered being. A hidden and price-less emerald on her finger. No, none of this could be happening to Anne Ott, whose life had been spent in the changeless security of a Connecticut village.

The engine tooted joyfully and rounded a curve. "Look up there, Miss Ott, and you'll see your happy home."

Perched on a bank so close above them that Anne could tell the colors of the window curtains, was a cluster of houses built in a circle and enclosed by a low white wall.

"The big house is where the Supe

lives. He's got Ching, a chink, who cooks for him, and a *mozo*, and a couple of them *criadas* I was telling you about. Real style, old Norcross puts on, but he's all right. He can use his mitts, you can bet. I seen him knock a mean Mex out once, cold, when the Mex come at him with a gun. Over there at the end is where Dave Milne lives, when he ain't in New York. And that large building with all those windows which you see up there's the club."

Two Mexicans in blue denims were struggling up the club steps with a ladder. Scotti immediately spotted them. "Getting ready for the fancy dress ball. The ladies will be standing on ladders all afternoon, hanging up the hearts and the red tissue paper."

"That's going to be some dance, Miss Ott. I'm on the committee," he added proudly. "Me and Mrs. Adams, the assistant supe's wife—you'll see her tonight, and I'll bet you think she's wearing a white wig! You don't want to miss the dance, Fancy dress. I'll be one of the judges, I guess."

A fancy dress ball. Red tissue paper. Hearts. Anne hadn't been to a fancy dress ball since the one in student third, when she had made her memorable tour to Europe.

"But, Mr. Scotti, I couldn't." Her voice was wistful. "I haven't any costume."

Scotti considered this as the train continued to toot under the camp embankment.

"Sure you have!" he said suddenly. "That *muy antigua* white dress you and me had such a time getting past the customs inspector. That will make the old hens sit right up and take notice, or I ain't a mill man. Yes, sir. Why you might even win the first prize, Miss Ott, and it's a lulu. I got it right here in my pocket!"

"I took it away from a jewelry salesman in Juarez who thought he knew how to play poker. I sure saved the club some money on that draw. Yes, sir, two of them, both exactly alike. And are they luhus?"

## CHAPTER THREE

## YOUNG APRIL



STENSIBLY, David Milne was dressing for the Valentine party at the club.

The Valentine party was a rite and an institution in Santa Cruz. The ladies of the camp—lady was a term still employed within the whitewashed walls which surrounded Santa Cruz—always got together for days before the fourteenth of February, and cut out paper hearts, dozens of them, hundreds of them, to disguise the rough and ready aspect of the club. They also got together to manufacture costumes from the material at hand.

One of these costumes now lay on David Milne's bed. The enterprising wife of the assistant superintendent had decided that in honor of the good Saint Valentine, David should be a jig-saw puzzle. So she had sacrificed the pieces from two of her husband's pet units of entertainment. The result was a colorful series of bumps wired on unbleached muslin, a costume which would have daunted a stouter jig-saw fan than David.

But he was not thinking of the ensuing discomfort which would be his share if he decided to sit out a dance. He was trying to put into verse his idea of April.

David was not a poet by profession—or he would scarcely have been in a mining camp. As a matter of fact, he was a metallurgical genius. Under his experiments, medium grade ore produced high grade concentrate. Ore which balked at ordinary reagents, could usually be coaxed into docility by one of David's formulas.

That was why he happened to be in Santa Cruz. His headquarters were in New York, at the main office of the company which owned, not only Santa Cruz, but a dozen other mines in Mexico, and properties all over the globe where marketable minerals were to be found.

Santa Cruz was one of their big units and when suddenly the entire flotation process of the camp seemed inadequate for the type of ore the mines were turn-

ing out, when neither the shift bosses nor the mill superintendent had a workable theory, David was sent down to the border by plane, and from there by private car to Santa Cruz.

David Milne did not look like a man who commanded private cars and planes. He was still in his early thirties, and because he was so slim and so unobtrusive, both by dress and by nature, he looked younger.

Women wanted immediately to mother him and a good many did—usually to his annoyance. His good firm jaw and his unruly dark hair ought to have warned them of that, because David's spirit, although no one would ever have suspected it, was as unruly as his hair.

He could not help being a genius with metals. He had been born that way. But his ambition was to write. Anything, it didn't matter what, so long as he could put beauty into words and those words could go into print. Up to date, except for the scraps of paper he continually carried in his pockets, and the reams of unfinished and unfinishable manuscript which were locked up in the library of his New York house, his only contributions to literature had been articles in mining journals.

David's ability with words was not so great as with metals. They eluded him. They fired his imagination when he was in the midst of a chemical experiment, they taunted him and mocked him to put them on paper, and when the pencil appeared they made off.

"Young April," he wrote now and stopped. He wanted to describe April as a girl, young, shy, alluring, with eyes the blue of violets in the woods, a fragrant, nymphlike creature who fled at the approach of summer. David had never known any girl like that. Perhaps, he reflected, struggling with a cufflink—he was trying to combine poetry with dressing for the dance—they had gone out with the victorias and prancing horses, the tiny parasols and the saucepan hats of our grandmother's day.

The fact was, although he would have been the last to realize it, David Milne's

shyness and his worldly assets attracted the more predatory type of female.

A number of match-making mothers in New York had tried to marry him off to their debutante daughters. His profession had saved him. Sudden calls to Mexico and Peru, unlimited sojourns in regions of the world where neither debutantes nor doting mothers could follow, had checkmated these potential romances.

But, ironically enough, it was his profession that had finally tripped him up. He had been in Santa Cruz this time for three months. So had Connie Norcross.

Connie was the superintendent's daughter, which in Santa Cruz gave her the prerogatives of a reigning princess. The first night he had gone to the Norcross' for dinner, she had decided that she was going to marry David. And when Connie made a decision she always got her way, whether the earth quaked, the thunder rolled, or her father bellowed and roared—he was an enormous man with a soft heart but a voice that made inefficiency tremble in its boots.

In this instance it had not taken long. David was lonely. The superintendent's house was spacious and well ordered. The food, which Ching cooked, was delicious, and Connie herself, with clothes from Fifth Avenue and a lovely figure, was a decidedly presentable young woman. Moreover, she was an excellent companion. Years spent with her father had taught her how to talk to men as well as flirt with them. And a few weeks is enough for any mining camp romance to flower. That was how it happened that David Milne was engaged to marry Connie Norcross.

"Young April, shod in green—" No, dammit, that wasn't right! Shod got you thinking about horses and chariots and flying hoofs. Slipped then. Too much like the shoe advertisement, anyway it would throw out the meter. "Young April." Where was that cuff link? He looked on the ink stand and felt in his pocket. Drat cuff links. Drat fancy dress balls. He hated the things. People making

fools of themselves in a lot of idiotic costumes. He hated dances anyway! Connie was an excellent dancer and he wasn't. He was painfully aware of the fact. If people would only waltz. There was some sense to that. The rhythm of it got into your feet.

The telephone shivered—all the telephones in Santa Cruz went through a process of preparing to sneeze before they rang.

"Hello, hello!" There was a sputter but no answer. He jangled the hook impatiently and turned the crank. Finally he heard Connie's voice in heated debate with the operator. "Of course he's there!"

"But, Señorita—"

"I know, you tried and he didn't answer. All right, try again!" Connie was always impatient with servants or underlings. Tonight it irritated David even more than usual. He broke in. "Connie, she did try. It's this darn phone. It's been having convulsions."

"What on earth have you been doing, David?" Connie sounded annoyed. Of course she would be when he had rebuked her—however slightly—in the operator's hearing. That had been stupid, David realized, but he did not want the poor girl to catch any of Henry Norcross's hell the next day. "Father and I have been waiting exactly twenty minutes. Aren't you coming over?"

"Of course, dear." He tried to be soothing. He shuddered at what she might say if he told her that it was Young April and not the cuff link which had made him late. "But I've lost a cuff link."

"David, you're impossible." Quite obviously Connie was not soothed. "You know I want to get there for the grand march. Hurry along and I'll lend you one of dad's."

When David had at last solved the puzzle of his jig-saw suit and had arrived at the Big House, as the superintendent's residence was called, he found a resplendent, if impatient, Queen of Hearts. Connie refused to look homemade, even at a masque dance, so she always ordered her costumes from the States.



Tonight she was in Valentine-red crinoline, with a bodice cut heart-shaped, revealing a really beautiful neck and shoulders. But David was not in a mood to appreciate their beauty.

When the whole camp knew that Connie had been breaking hearts ever since she was old enough to have short hair and wear high heels, why couldn't she let it go at that? Why need she advertise her attractions? It was like lending your picture for cold cream or stockings, David thought.

Now if she had gone as Catherine of Russia! The same white wig, but without the jeweled heart on her head, heavy brocades, a bodice still low cut. Yes, she would have been superb. She had the nose, slightly beaked—the only feature, fortunately, which she had inherited from her father—and the dark eyes, which David always associated with the Russian Catherine.

Apparently she was waiting for him to tell her she looked well. "Don't you like it?"

"Why Catherine—I mean Connie—you are so splendid that a jig-saw remnant like me will look a tramp beside you!"

She disregarded this sweeping compliment, and inspected him with those dark, penetrating eyes, which the assistant superintendent's wife insisted could see through a keyhole even when there was a key in it. "David, how did you happen to call me Catherine?"

David stuttered. "You won't believe me if I tell you, Catherine—I mean Connie—but it's the truth. For a minute you reminded me so of a portrait of Catherine of Russia—I wonder where I saw that? Maybe it was in The Louvre; no couldn't have been there—that I thought of you in gold-threaded brocade."

Connie was mollified. She even kissed him fleetingly. "Not too hard, darling. I've made up my mouth like a heart, and I don't want any of the lip stick to come off. Now fasten this on for me," she handed him a white satin mask, "and we'll pull father's nose out of his highball and get along."

Henry Norcross was, for the evening,

a monk in a cowl, a disguise which would deceive nobody, but which enabled him to shed the dignity which befitted a superintendent—or a monk—and to prance and caper as if he were again a young engineer with an eye, which he still had, for the ladies.

The dance committee had discreetly refrained from starting the grand march until the royal family should arrive. So a long line of turkeys and monkeys, women from the harem, knights in hand-made and home-made armor, hard-rock miners who had been persuaded that Pierrot costumes would conceal their muscles, were, so to speak, champing at the bit. So were the orchestra who had been imported from the village a mile away, with fiddles—and guns strapped under their shoulders. Music in Mexico did not prevent a man from protecting his life against the terrors of the night.

"Now take my arm, darling; we're to lead the grand march. It's been all arranged."

David hated things that were arranged, and he particularly hated grand marches. He would get out of step, that was inevitable. He knew himself.

He also knew that orchestra. They would start off in march time and then with Latin fervor, they would swing into a waltz or tango, while the becostumed line of humanity was still trying to struggle past the judges whose decision meant three important prizes, bought out of the club fund. The whole business was a bore.

The judges would award the first prize to Catherine—to Connie! Why would he keep calling her Catherine tonight? He'd be in trouble if he weren't careful. That was expected. She always won the prize for the best costume. She always wore it. Then they would put their heads together and make some flotation operator, and one of the nurses, or the cleverly costumed wife of a mine foreman happy. Well, he wished they'd get it over with.

"You're marvelous," the assistant superintendent's wife, who was a white-haired Martha Washington for the evening, whispered as they turned the corner.

"You did a good job, Frances," he whispered back—after all, she'd made the costume, "but you forgot the patch on my pants."

"Well, I thought you ought to dance every dance. You know your talent for sitting out, David." She replied archly. "Then the second with me."

RRR-RRR-RRRRR—the piano growled. Scotti held up his hand—Scotti was one of the judges.

"In view of the fact that this time there had been no doubt in anyone's mind—is that the way to begin a speech? I don't know much about speech-making myself, but the committee delegated me onto it."

RRRRRRR—the piano was attempting to quiet all the noisier element who were more interested in the beer which flowed in the pool room than in prizes.

"Then in view of the fact that there ain't no doubt in the judges' minds, we will not follow the usual procedure. We will not request the possible choices to walk in front of us so as to select the winning three. Ladies and gentlemen, the winning three have already been selected.

"This evening we will first award the prize to the gentleman who has the most original costume present. No, ladies, don't get all het up; you're going to get the lion's share of the loot. That's why we're putting you second. Hold everything and you may get something for nothing.

"But as I was saying when I was so rudely interrupted, the judges have decided that the most original costume on any man is worn by that there jig-saw puzzle who lead the race. We may suspect his identity, but we don't know. So, jig-saw, if you want one carton of cigarettes and an ash tray to go with it, you'd better step up."

"I knew it," Frances Adams whispered in his ear. "Didn't I tell you you were marvelous."

"Now for the ladies. The judges have been unable to decide which of the fair sex are fairer, so they've decided on a draw, a vanity case guaranteed real gold, and you can send it back if it ain't all it ought to be, for each of the first prize

winners. The Queen of Hearts and the little lady in the white velvet, will both please step up."

David's heart did a somersault. Not because he had won a carton of cigarettes. Not because he had seen Connie's face when Scotti had said the judges could not decide.

As a matter of fact, David was not thinking of Connie. He was watching the girl beside her who had come demurely up to receive the other vanity case. That girl had eyes as blue as wood violets. She wore a tight-waisted gown and a flat pan-cake hat, such as he had supposed had gone out in his grandmother's day. All she needed was a tiny parasol to make her perfect. She was Young April. . . .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TOMORROW



ANNE had never felt like a lizard—nor like salamander. Lizards were creatures who lay and blinked in the sun, useless creatures, so far as she knew, until they were caught and made into shoes or pocket books. And salamanders, as she understood it, had only one outstanding characteristic, to be able to take on the color of their surroundings.

The morning after the dance at the club, she felt both like a lizard and a salamander, or were salamanders lizards? She wasn't sure. But for the first time in her life Anne had no desire to do anything useful. She simply wanted to lie in the sun and remember. Remember the club so gayly festooned with hearts, remember the way her own heart had beat with surprised triumph when Scotti had called her up to award her the prize, which he had confiscated from the jeweler in Juarez at a poker game.

Yesterday Scotti's ruthless methods of saving club money had shocked her. This morning she touched the vanity case with pride as she dressed for a quick breakfast and the school room. Hence the salamander. Anne Ott had suffered a desert or a mountain change. The drudge of

Miss Minton's exclusive school for girls could never have flirted, as she had last night, with a fat man in a cowl who went around singing:

*A jolly Friar am I.*

*Hey, Nonny nonny. Hey, Nonny nonny—*

"Of course those aren't the words. Forgot them years ago! But there is a song about a jolly fat friar, and those words will do for us, won't they, Miss Ott? Thought so. You are Miss Ott. It takes more than a mask to hide the new school teacher from me. I certainly did a good job when I told them to go ahead and hire you."

So this was Mr. Norcross, the superintendent himself, who was laughing at her blushes. Mr. Norcross, who was swinging her through a rowdy Paul Jones and booming compliments in her ear.

"Grand right and left."

Then the whistle and the scramble for partners. Suddenly the violins had taken on a magic they had not possessed before. The drum beat like a troubled pulse. The red hearts fluttered above them. The piano, untuned these many years, rallied to sheer melody. Anne was waltzing with the other prize winner—the man in the jig-saw suit!

Their steps melted together in an old-fashioned waltz, their hands touching, his arm around her. All she could see of his face was a determined chin and a sensitive mouth—smiling now. His eyes were slits behind the mask, but she could feel them watching her. And his voice—

"Do you realize that you are perfect? Your hat, your dress—"

"Change partners—everybody!"

"Damn," from her partner, and the jolly friar had caught her again in his well padded embrace.

That was the last of the jig-saw. Anne had seen him piloting other women around the room, but he had been watching her. She was sure of it. When they unmasked he was gone. He was no longer there in the flesh, but Anne could still see his mouth smiling at her. Still hear his words—"You are perfect."

She patted the vanity case and looked into the mirror. What she saw was an Anne Ott whose cheeks were unexpectedly flushed, whose eyes were bright; an Anne Ott who for the first time in her life had been popular at a dance, who had actually been desirable to men.

Of course she could have asked who he was—her unknown partner in the jig-saw suit. All of those fifty or sixty Americans gathered together to celebrate St. Valentine's Eve knew one another. Some of them had been in this camp for twenty years, as they had told her last night. Through changes of government, through revolutions.

Doctor Hilyard, with his pointed red beard, who looked like Faust in a domino. Mr. Brooks, the mill superintendent, who had the face of tortured saint, and wore blue overalls and a farmer's hat. His wife in a Hula costume.

Anne wondered if Mrs. Brooks dyed her hair, or if it was really that strange color of dark red. Of course, she couldn't have been here twenty years. She was too young. But even the newest comer, except for herself, had at least sixty days in Santa Cruz to his credit. She could have asked any of them about the man who had waltzed with her. Scotti could have told her who he was, or Mr. Norcross. But she didn't want to ask. That would have taken away part of the glamour.

Quarter past eight. The alarm clock was ticking remorselessly. She wasn't a lizard, however warm and alluring the sun outside her window might look. She was a school teacher who had not had any breakfast, and who wasn't apt to get any unless she hurried. And there was still the Green Monster to be delivered.

The Green Monster was locked, for the moment, in her trunk, but it couldn't stay there forever. Yesterday, as soon as she had arrived, she had tried to get its owner on the telephone, only to be told by the clerk in his office that Mr. Milne had gone to Parral.

"Good heavens," she gasped, "won't he be back?"

Suppose he wouldn't be back? Suppose she had brought the Green Monster all the way to Santa Cruz, only to miss Mr. Milne by so narrow a margin. What should she do? She remembered that the emerald had already made several trips back and forth between here and the border. Suppose that it were one of those unlucky stones that you read about, that were ill-fated?

But the Mexican clerk had been reassuring. "Tomorrow," he said, in his polite English, "we expect the Señor in his office."

She had been told not to deliver it to anyone except Mr. Milne. She obviously could not wear another girl's engagement ring around camp. So there was nothing for her to do but lock it in her trunk and wait.

As soon as Anne had let shouting youngsters loose on a drowsy camp after their first day in school under her somewhat dazed discipline, she went back to her room for the green leather box which held the monster. Then she started resolutely past the tennis courts and the superintendent's long white house to the offices.

Yesterday—could it have been yesterday, only twenty-four hours ago—when Scotti had taken her over to the offices to register her arrival? He had shown her a little glassed-in building behind the mill. "That's where Dave Milne makes all his experiments. You can find him there all day and half the night sometimes with his nose glued up against a beaker of acid. Why one night when I was coming off the graveyard shift, I seen a light in there, and there he was, scratching figures on a sheet of paper.

"Don't you ever sleep, Mr. Milne?" I says.

"He grinned at me and he says, 'Well, Scotti, it don't look like you was in pajamas yourself.'

"He's a hard worker, Mr. Milne!"

Anne had wanted to stop, then and there, and deliver the Green Monster, but of course Scotti didn't know that she had it. His feelings might be hurt if he thought they had trusted her with

something which he might lose in a poker game—and that would never do when he had been as kind as possible.

But at least she could find her way back, and she was tired of delays and phone calls. She was determined to get rid of this emerald that disturbed her dreams at night and had forced her to wear gloves for two days. If Mr. Milne was the hard worker Scotti said he was, he was sure to be there.

It was the clerk who opened the door of the little glassed-in building. "No, Señorita, I am sorry but Señor Milne is not here. He is sick. He was burned today by the acid. The doctor sent him home."

The mill with broken windows and its great rusted cast-iron frame, roared at her as she passed, like some growling prehistoric animal who warned her that she would never be able to deliver that emerald. Anne was sure that the peons who were lounging against the wall of the Pay Office with striped blankets over their shoulders were watching her as suspiciously as if they knew that she carried a small fortune in the green box.

David Milne burned by acid; the emerald was unlucky. She had been certain of it all along. He was probably in bed, a trained nurse taking care of him. He was probably too ill to receive visitors no matter what they brought him. But at least she could try. She remembered that his house was the last one above the railway track. There was nothing to do now but to go there and ask to see him personally.

In the garden of the house, which Scotti had pointed out as belonging to David Milne, an old man was loosening the earth in the flower beds, where as yet not even a green shoot appeared. He rose painfully when he heard the gate and pulled off his hat with a rusty flourish. He was old, old with grizzled hair, and a puckered up brown face like an ancient but good-natured monkey.

"Could I see Mr. Milne?"

"Señor Milne?" he repeated. At least he had caught that much.

Anne nodded and the monkeylike old

man bowed and led her straight to the back door. She tried to protest. She had not been in Santa Cruz long enough to realize that all the front entrances on this side of camp having been boarded up when the railroad was built, back doors were the accepted and popular means of entrance.

But English was useless. The ancient gardener couldn't, or wouldn't, understand it. He didn't even knock. He simply opened the door and called out, "Señor Milne?" gave another of his absurd bows and creaked his way down the back steps.

And then, instead of a trained nurse in uniform, a most astonishing vision appeared. A coatless man with unruly dark hair, who was wiping his hands on a towel, stood at the open kitchen door. Tied around his waist was a ridiculous apron, decorated with appliqued sunflowers. Around his neck was an empty sling, and his left arm, where the shirt sleeve was rolled up, was bandaged to the elbow.

"Mr. Milne?" Anne stammered. It must be Mr. Milne, as long as his arm was bandaged. Just what he was doing in a yellow and white apron she couldn't imagine, but maybe he wore it when he was conducting his experiments.

"Yes, absolutely the same. Won't you come in? The place is something of a mess. I'm afraid, Mrs.—Mrs.—"

"Miss Ott," she supplied.

His voice! Why did it seem so hauntingly familiar? "My servant took the day off without permission," he went on to explain, "and I've been trying to clean up. But I'm afraid I'm not much good at it."

Suddenly he smiled. The magic of the violins. The drum beating like a troubled pulse. A waltz. A man in a jig-saw puzzle suit, whose sensitive mouth smiled down at her. David Milne! The Green Monster was for him—for Miss Norcross. He was engaged to the superintendent's daughter! Scotti had said so.

Then, surprisingly enough, David Milne exclaimed, "Why—why—you're Young April!"

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE GREEN MONSTER

**A**FTERWARD David Milne was not quite clear as to what happened on the afternoon of the Fifteenth of February. It was to him a series of waves of sharp physical pain and bright pleasure, of doubt and disaster.

He should have known better, he realized, than to have let his Mexican assistant handle that test tube. Natives, however intelligent they might be, never realized the potential calamity which some chemicals contained.

If anything happened, it was always an act of God. Well, perhaps it had been an act of God. If it had not been for that test tube, if it had not been for his burned arm—

The doctor and the hard-boiled camp nurse with the picric acid. Picric acid hurt like the devil. Making him lie down on a hard hospital bed, telling him that he ought to stay there until next day. A burn like that was a bad shock to the nerves.

Undoubtedly the hospital was the place for him, but it smelled of disinfectant and roaches, and in the native ward across from him, a mincr, whose leg had been amputated, was groaning horribly.

"Of course you can go home, if you feel that way about it, Dave." Doctor Hilyard had been in Santa Cruze when David was a young engineer—and long before. His red beard and his shock of red hair, which had caused the natives to call him *El Diablo* and to consider, privately, that some of his cures were effected with the help of dark magic, were turning gray now.

"But for God's sake take care of yourself. Keep your arm in the sling today anyway. If the pain gets too much, here's something for you. Or send for me and I'll give you a shot of morphine."

"I'll be all right. If I need anything, old Amalia's a pretty good nurse." And David promptly disobeyed instructions by slipping his arm out of the sling and stuffing the thing into his pocket as soon

as he had rounded the corner of the hospital. Bad enough to get burned without the whole camp talking about it and the women trooping in with soup and jellies. He wasn't going to be treated like an invalid. Coddled. Amalia could give him his dinner and waddle around for anything he needed.

But when David got home Amalia was not there. Vicente, digging in the flower beds explained, "She asked me to tell you, Señor. She regretted it deeply. But they brought her aunt, the one who is married to the bootmaker, home with a seizure, and Amalia's son, Carlos, came after her. The aunt, Señor, is not expected to live!"

David doubted that the shoemaker's wife was mortally ill. If he remembered correctly, she had been having seizures ever since he was a young engineer—they gave her prestige among her relatives—but she had survived often enough to have another today, so that he would have to find the lunch dishes still on the table. David was extraordinarily neat in his habits and these dirty dishes offended him.

He tried to smoke his pipe, but the taste of tobacco made him ill. He tried lying down, but he was too restless for that, so he wandered out into the garden. Nor was that any good. Vicente was a garrulous old ape.

He began on the subject of Amalia. "She regretted it deeply, Señor, but the condition of her aunt is serious, very serious. They have sent for the old mother who lives on the hacienda. They have sent for the sister who lives in Parral. And tonight they may telegraph the brother of the bootmaker, who owns a *cantina* in Jimenez. Si, Señor, one of the best. The Gate to Paradise, he calls his saloon, but they tell me he charges a great deal for drinks. Cognac, now, would cost—"

David cut him short. "Did they send for the doctor?"

Vicente scratched his grizzled monkey head. "Pues, Señor, about that I would not know. This may be a case for herbs, and not a doctor. I myself am going to

the church to burn a candle to the Virgin and ask her intercession for Amalia's aunt. Amalia is a noble woman!"

David laughed in spite of himself. He had long suspected an aged romance between these two, but it amused him to hear Amalia called noble. Certainly her proportions were all of that. She weighed upward of two hundred pounds, some of which obesity, David suspected, had come from the food she had filched.

He flung a silver *toslin* piece to Vicente. "Here's fifty cents, if that will buy any candles for the aunt."

"Oh, Señor," Vicente's bow was so low that he almost toppled into the flower bed. "The whole church will be lighted up. The Virgin will think it is a feast day."

The idea pleased David. That serene and eternally youthful wax image over the altar in the dingy little village church. So alone, she had always seemed, except on feast days. Only a solitary, blackshawled penitent kneeling at her young feet, and now her church lighted up when there was no feast. The smile on her face while the candles burned.

He threw Vicente another silver piece. "Mind you, these are for candles and not *tequila*, and if you come here drunk tomorrow, I will have the superintendent fire you."

David went inside for paper and pencil. He cleared a space on the dining room table and began. "The Virgin standing alone in State."

Damn his arm. Maybe Doc Hilyard was right. Maybe the sling would help. He pulled it out of his pocket and hung it awkwardly about his neck. At least it wouldn't keep him from using a pencil.

He made a fresh start.

None came to worship  
No candles burned

Darn these dirty dishes. You couldn't be inspired with a salt and pepper shaker under your nose and a wilted lettuce leaf swimming in French dressing. Of course, he could ask Vicente to clean up, but that would mean an afternoon of clatter

and broken dishes, and the constant staccato of thonged sandals over the kitchen floor.

There was only one other thing to do. Wash them himself. David found the sunflower-bedecked apron which he had forbidden Amalia to wear, but which she nevertheless cherished. He dumped at least a half a box of soap flakes impatiently into the dishpan and was thoroughly entangled in the ensuing suds when he heard Vicente call from the back porch.

At first he thought one of the camp wives, whom he did not recognize, was standing at the door. It was too much to hope that the news of his accident would not spread through Santa Cruz. The most trivial events were discussed and rediscussed there, half an hour after they had happened. Well, after all, there was nothing to do but accept an intended kindness with courtesy. Then an errant breeze blew a tendril of brown hair across her face.

"Young April!" he exclaimed, without intending to exclaim anything. Of course she was Young April—The new school teacher who reminded him of the fragrance of long forgotten love letters. The enchantingly shy little thing he wanted to put into a poem.

She appeared not to have noticed his vocal lapse. "Mr. Milne, they asked me to bring something down to you. I have it here." But David didn't stop to ask what it was. He realized suddenly that he was wearing an apron glaring with sunflowers, and that for all he knew he might have some of that confounded suds in his hair or on the tip of his nose.

Also, for all he knew, Frances Adams might pop out of her back door at any moment. The Adams lived in the next house and Frances was given to popping up at unexpected places like an attractive female Jack-in-the-Box. If Frances saw him looking like something left over from the masquerade of the night before, she would razz him for years to come, and her tongue was as sharp as her intentions were kind.

"Come on in," he suggested earnestly,

"until I can get this horror off." He began to tug at a knot that was worthy of a sailor rather than a housekeeper.

"Wait. Let me do that for you!" Anne had blushed a deep pink. Wild rose color, David thought. She did look like a wild rose, her skin was so soft and unpainted. Once when they were dancing last night, his face had touched hers and her cheek had been like the petal of a flower.

These, he realized, were not exactly the thoughts for an engaged man to have, but as long as Miss Ott was simply an embodiment of his ideal for a poem, they probably wouldn't do any harm. Connie couldn't object to that. It wasn't as if he were interested in the girl personally.

"Mr. Milne," the poetic embodiment was remarking practically, "you should never have been doing dishes with that arm. Didn't the doctor tell you to keep it in a sling? I was so sorry when I heard."

"Well, yes," David answered sheepishly. It didn't occur to him to ask her how she knew about his arm. He put that down to the camp news system. "In a way he did. But I can't stand a mess. And I expect that old Amalia, she is my cook, is worse off than I am. At least, my aunt hasn't had a seizure." He grinned boyishly. "You ought to know Amelia. She's the fattest and the best natured rogue in Santa Cruz."

"I should think she was a rogue, to go off and leave your dishes when you'd just come home from the hospital. But you weren't trying to wash them in that?" Anne pointed to the mountain of stiff white suds. "Look," she said, "it won't take five minutes. You sit there and then you can tell me where to put them."

David protested, but somewhat feebly. His arm was beginning to hurt again, a sickening pain that seared his whole left side. Anne already had the coat to her sensible blue suit off. She was already tying the apron over her frilly white blouse. He turned around and swallowed one of the tablets the doctor had given him. Silly that a burned arm should make a full-grown man feel so weak.



It was pleasant to have Miss Ott here. It was pleasant to sit in a chair and watch her while she slid the dishes so noiselessly through the soap suds. Amalia made such a to-do over dish washing. You could hear it through a closed door. But this child was so sure and somehow comfortable. The drab mining-camp kitchen seemed like home with her here. She was probably the kind who baked ginger cookies.

"There," said Anne, strapping on her wrist watch again, "exactly seven minutes. Not a bad record, was it? And now I'm going to give you a hot cup of tea. You look as if you needed it. No, no, don't get up; the kettle's boiling and I saw the tea box on the pantry shelf."

Tea and hot buttered toast, made over the coals on the kitchen range—along, no doubt, with the effect of the tablet he had taken—and David felt that he ought to purr like a grateful cat. He had avoided kitchens since the days when he was small enough to hope that the cook would let him lick the mixing bowl, or the dasher out of the ice-cream freezer.

He remembered the great old-fashioned white bowl with blue stripes, where every cake had its origin, and Maggie chiding him, "Now, now, Master David, there'll be another day coming, and stripes aren't good for little boy's stomachs."

He could still see her crisp, white apron and smell the savory things that came out of the oven. Warm spice cake with a taster beside for him, and apple pies fragrant with cinnamon.

"I'll bet you know how to cook."

"Of course," Anne said, pouring him another cup of tea. "Doesn't almost any woman?"

"Um—well, I wouldn't be too sure of that," he replied, thinking of the debutantes he had known who had wrinkled their noses at the very idea. Of the week Ching had been away and Connie was so coldly reproachful about having to eat at the club.

"The funny part about it is that I never thought of you as that kind of a girl at all. I thought of you—well, I wanted to put you in a poem."

"A poem!" Anne echoed. Again that wild rose flush, and her blue eyes lighted up like a child's about to open a package. "How wonderful! Do you write poetry?"

And then David told her what he had never told another human being; of his desires and his attempts to put words on paper. "I'm no good at it. Last night I was almost late for the masquerade trying to put down my ideas of spring—do you mind if I smoke a pipe? I wanted to call it Young April, and I wanted her to be like you. Only I didn't quite know how that was, and then I met you—and you even wore lace mitts."

David was excited now, as he always was when he talked about poetry, any poetry. He had even forgotten to be self-conscious about his own—the girl on the other side of the table seemed to be so eager. "Now today, I was trying to do one about the church, and the Virgin who was surprised because the candles were lighted. You must go down to the village some day and see the church."

"It isn't much, but the Virgin is rather nice, and when you come out, you'll find the Padre pacing up and down under the cottonwood trees—and then the mountains! You can't see them from here, but they tower over the village like blue fortresses, and at dusk they are dark and mysterious. There is one peak that glows exactly like an enormous ruby in the setting sun."

"I've always wanted to ride up into them. But when I was here before, they were a hide-out for bandits."

"And then Parral. But you don't know Parral, do you?"

"No," Anne replied, "but as I came through on the train, I wanted to stop. It looked, well"—again that quick blush—"like Bagdad."

David laughed at her. "I hate to disillusion you, but Parral is not exactly the city of Haroun al Raschid. But I think you might like it. There is a certain flavor there, and you're quite right, a certain sense of mystery. I'd like to show it to you some day."

"You know, Miss Ott," he went on, "you're a great girl. You don't just see



with eyes alone, as somebody expressed it."

"Oh," Anne put her cup down into the saucer so abruptly that the tea went sloshing over onto the table. "I don't see with any eyes at all. I'm dreadful. I forgot what I came here for." She jumped up and opened her purse. "I brought this down for you. They told me to be careful and get it to you at once—and I was careful until this afternoon. And then I forgot—your arm, and the dishes, and everything put it out of my mind!"

She handed David the green leather box. "I wore it all the way down, under my glove. They said I mustn't let Mr. Scotti see it. And he didn't."

"And just as well," said a cool, carefully modulated voice from the door. "I suppose you're talking about my ring, and really it's none of Scotti's business—nor anybody else's as far as I can see—except David's and mine. By the way, how are you, David? Vicente didn't seem to know that you had been hurt. He said I would find you inside, but he didn't mention any visitors."

"Wait a minute, Connie," David exclaimed. "Miss Ott brought the Green—I mean, brought your ring down."

If Connie had heard David, she ignored him. She had turned to Anne. "I was wondering if, by any chance, your name was Catherine?"

## CHAPTER SIX

BROOKS-ADAMS, LTD.

**M**Y dear, but you must come right over. I can't help it if the rolls won't be properly baked for lunch—you coddle Tom too much as it is."

"No, Liela, I can't tell you over the telephone. You know the operators always listen, and this is something I wouldn't discuss with another soul in camp. You will simply die of joy when you hear. All right then, I'll come down to you."

Frances Adams hung the well-worn ear-piece of her telephone back on its

hook, called out a hurried order to the *criada*, who was doing the children's room, stopped for a moment before the mirror to pat her hair into shape, and went out of the kitchen door. Her hair was the keynote of her character. Frances was only in her late thirties. She was small and plump and amazingly girlish except for her hair. That was snow white.

It had been snow white for years now. Ever since the train, which was taking her into Mexico, had been held up a few hours below the border, and she had watched five of her fellow passengers taken off and shot. She had known what might happen when the soldiers came through the car.

Mexico was going through troubled times before Obregon took over the presidency. But she had not been able to shut her eyes and wait. Her curiosity had made her look through the window and had kept her watching until the execution was over.

That was completely typical of Frances Adams. She was neither unkind nor calloused. She simply was not able to stand back from life. She must always plant her small feet firmly in the middle of a situation and face the outcome, no matter what pain it brought. She was like a small, benevolent warrior, who never waited for the enemy to declare hostilities.

In a mining camp where the pattern of existence was so closely woven, she might have been dynamite, but a clear intelligence and an exceedingly quick wit always saved her—and a good many other people from disaster.

Her husband, Paul, curiously enough, was a good-natured chap who plodded through life without ever realizing that human values were as important as mineral ones. He adored his wife and his two Dutch-doll little girls, and had an almost doglike devotion to Henry Norcross. He and Henry had been in the same class at the Colorado School of Mines. But he had none of Henry's booming executive ability.

Frances Adams, in her clear-sighted

way, knew this and did not resent it. Far from envying Henry Norcross, she was grateful to him for supplying what her husband lacked, and thereby enabling Paul to make an efficient assistant superintendent under his direction.

The Adams had been in Santa Cruz for six years now, ever since Henry Norcross had been made superintendent. It was home to them, and Frances would have been completely content if it had not been for Connie Norcross.

It was Connie's Olympian attitude that she resented. Not to herself; she was adequately equipped to guard her own rights, but to the rest of the camp. When Frances Adams interfered in other people's affairs it was warily, wholeheartedly, with a desire to award plums to the deserving. When Connie interfered, which she often did, it was a sort of frigid, unbending fatality, which brought the plums, if any, to Connie Norcross.

As she walked by the neat little row of white houses, Frances thought how much more desirable Santa Cruz, or almost any Mexican mining camp for that matter, was than those in the States. No shiftless poverty here. No grinding and bitter unhappiness. The miners, the workmen, were all natives with a fatalistic acceptance of life and death. As long as they had their religion, something to eat, something to drink, music occasionally, and they were happy.

They had no desire to become anything but what they were. They would not have traded their adobe houses in the village, their flowers, their mongrel dogs and their innumerable children for anything on earth.

It was right and proper that the Americans—the bosses—should live to themselves inside the white wall that separated them from the native population. It was right that these Dons from North America should manage affairs which the peons neither understood nor cared to understand. Enough that they should be able to pray to the Virgin and receive their pay check each Saturday.

Whenever Frances passed this row of houses, she felt a little like the woman

in Kipling's *Under the Deodars*, who wore the mandarin coats and had lived such a long while in India. What was her name? And maybe it wasn't mandarin coats—but some native garment.

Of course, this wasn't India and there weren't any rickshaws or mandarin coats. You couldn't go to the hill country for your vacation. But still there was Parral occasionally, and riding. There were dances and bridge and gossip. Frances admitted frankly that she liked gossip, if it weren't too malicious. It added salt and pepper to the ordinary dish of life.

Liela Brooks lived in the house at the other end of the row, where the thick-trunked cottonwood trees whispered through the warm days and the clear nights. A little house, exactly like all the others, until you went inside.

Liela's house fitted her. She had lacquered all of the uncompromising oak furniture which the company supplied. She had painted her floors. She had even calcimined her own walls, with the result that her living room was apricot and midnight blue, a charming place—if a bit startling in Santa Cruz, where every living room boasted golden oak and cream colored walls. A bright red macaw chattered in one of the windows, and a topaz-colored cat got up and stretched lazily when Frances came in.

"Throw Max on the floor," Liela said, not bothering to move from her own chair. The cat's name was Maximilian, but the camp knew him as Max. "He always takes the softest cushion in the house."

There was something amber and almost feline about Liela Brooks in repose. Although she was nothing of a cat, Frances Adams reflected as her hostess lazily reached for a cigarette from a blue and silver cigarette box. Quite the contrary. But her hair was such a curious shade of dark red and her skin was so white, that Frances, who had never been nearer the South Seas than San Francisco, was convinced that the island girls, who wrought such havoc among visiting ship's officers, must look exactly like Liela. No one would have supposed that

she was the most meticulous housekeeper in camp, nor that Tom Brooks was the best fed mill superintendent Santa Cruz had ever had.

"There are matches on the little table. Now sit down, Frances, and tell me what's on your mind."

"We have to start another campaign." These two had started—for better or for worse—every campaign in the last few years. Liela's South Sea appearance was only protective coloration, concealing her tremendous energy.

She laughed. "What for now? Higher education and the book club, or the more frivolous impulses and a fund for dances?"

"Neither." Frances usually did not smoke in the mornings, so she was puffing luxuriously on her unaccustomed cigarette. "The new school teacher."

"Oh, little Miss Ott. She looked rather nice at the masquerade. But why start a campaign for her? Her room is comfortable and clean, isn't it? You and I looked it over before she came. She will get her salary checks every month and be able to bank at least half of them—I wish we could save that much pocket money. And if my son or your daughters start anything in their latin classes, we can look stern and disapproving for discipline's sake, and then tell her privately that we will whale the tar out of our brats if they don't behave."

"Well, that's not it. It's Connie Norcross."

"Ah." Liela reached for another cigarette, appreciatively. She did not like Connie any more than did her companion in arms. "That puts another complexion on your campaign. But how do she and the mousie little Miss Ott fit in. Somehow I never would have thought that those two would have chosen one another for friends or enemies."

"They didn't, darling. Of course they wouldn't. But you remember at the masquerade, when Scotti awarded two first prizes—divided it, in fact? That was stupid of him. He should have given first prize to Connie and the second prize to the Ott girl. Cause number one.

"Cause number two—David danced with her, I mean with the school teacher, and acted like a nincompoop, and you may not have been noticing, but not long after that dance Connie took him home. You know, men are fools. He ought to know Connie well enough by this time to guess—just guess—that she doesn't like competition."

"I hadn't paid much attention," Liela admitted, "but I still don't see what your campaign is about. Do you want to recreate David's fervor, or Connie's, or what?"

"Wait until you hear what happened yesterday. Miss Ott brought the Green Monster down." The whole camp knew that Connie Norcross had not liked her engagement ring, and that David had sent it back twice to have it reset; that at Connie's command, the emerald had been entirely surrounded with diamonds, although, so the story went, David Milne had argued that they were ostentatious.

"As I understand it, Miss Ott was to give the ring to David. She couldn't find him at the office, so she took it to his house, and found him there trying to wash a mound of dirty dishes. Well, what wouldn't any decent-minded woman do? Pitch in and help! Then, I expect, David was beginning to look pretty pale around the gills—"

"Yes," Liela amended. "Tom said it was really a much worse accident than anybody knew."

"Well, at any rate, she made him a cup of tea. Perfectly harmless, entirely kind-hearted, but while they were drinking their tea, who should come in but Connie. The back door was open a crack, and that crazy old Vicente told her to go right in. Well, you know Connie."

Liela didn't say anything, but her eyes narrowed a trifle. She did know Connie.

"Fortunately, I arrived about that time."

Liela chuckled. "Of course you hadn't been looking out your window. You hadn't seen Miss Ott go in the back door. You hadn't waited for her to come out, and you had no idea Connie had appeared."

"Just as you like. We won't go into those details. But I arrived and I invited them all to a cold supper at my house." She paused dramatically. "And they all came. It was just like the first act of a play. Connie was—well—she was temperamental. The school teacher is a darling, and she doesn't know what it's all about. Neither does David, if you ask me. And Henry Norcross was just as amused as I was. I think he has a slight yen for the little Ott."

"That's good. One obstacle less. And what is your next move?"

Frances considered. "I'm not quite sure. I don't want to get the little Ott in trouble. She's much too nice. But I would like Connie to think she's having a run for her money. Left to herself, the Ott will do nothing whatever but crawl back into her shell."

"You mean that Connie will put her there, but that with our backing—"

"Something like that, darling. I wondered if you would want to go in with me to announce her official arrival in camp. A buffet supper, bridge. We can see to it that she plays at David's table—if she does play. Otherwise, we'll have to do some coaching in the next few weeks. We might get Scotti to help out. She must be made to feel popular. If I'm not mistaken, men were scarce up Connecticut way, where she comes from."

"I see your point, Frances. I was thinking of sending for a grocery order from the States. We can add whatever we need for our party. Bullion, chicken in aspic, hot biscuit—yes, we can manage that. But afterward?"

"Afterward," Frances remarked complacently, petting the topaz colored Maximilian, "we can let Connie worry."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### PARRAL

**A**NNE OTT was confused. She knew enough about national politics to be able to give her class in American history a rudimentary idea of them, but she had no notion that camp politics even existed.

Martha Washington of the masquerade, whose beautiful white wig had turned out to be real and whose name was actually Mrs. Adams, mother of Elizabeth and Helen, aged ten and twelve, had been very kind to her. Mrs. Brooks, mother of Thomas Brooks, Jr., whose hair was as dark red as his mother's, so hers couldn't be dyed, had also been kind.

Each of these ladies had asked her to drop in for tea in the afternoon, and each of them had asked her to play bridge in the evening with the redoubtable Scotti for a fourth. Fortunately, Anne played a solid, but naïve game, so naïve that it always surprised her when a finesse worked, which seemed to please both Mrs. Adams and Mrs. Brooks.

After the Tuesday at the Brooks home, Scotti muttered darkly, "I don't know what to make of it. Something's in the wind."

"What are you talking about, Scotti?" Anne had asked uneasily. He was seeing her across the tennis courts to her room in the guest house.

"You wouldn't know, kid." He pulled a leaf off a low-hanging cottonwood tree and began chewing it. "I ain't sure myself. I told you not to get mixed up with any bunch too soon. Now Mrs. Adams and Mrs. Brooks are all right. Swell gals. But something's up. The cards ain't all on the table, and somebody's bidding for the jack pot. That's all I know."

Scotti's prediction made her uneasy. She realized that behind his hooked nose and his eagle eyes there was uncanny perception.

Since then there had been other things. David's painful flush when he had run into her at the club one night. "I didn't get much of a chance to thank you about the ring. You must have gone to a lot of trouble. I want you to know I appreciate it." Then he had made a sudden bolt for the pool table where Mr. Norcross was shouting at his opponent.

And Miss Norcross' attitude. She seemed so friendly, and so polite, and yet each time after Anne saw her she felt like a founding who had been discovered in a basket. Of course, that was ridicu-

lous. Miss Norcross had been rude about the ring, but the night at Mrs. Adams' she had seemed extremely cordial.

Anne told herself that she was being extremely foolish and petty. She should not let such things bother her. She was here in Santa Cruz, actually in Mexico. She had a position, really a splendid one. She had not drawn more than one-third of her first month's pay from the company office. She didn't have to worry about food. She ate at the mess, and it was far more bountiful than Miss Min-ton's board.

The club laundress not only did her washing and ironing, but her pressing and mending, for a ridiculously small sum. She enjoyed the children. Mining camp children were different from the usual run of young America, more original, less to the pattern. And next week Mrs. Adams and Mrs. Brooks were actually giving a party in her honor.

Anne had never had a party given in her honor. She ought to have been pleased, excited. She was. But at the same time she was a little frightened.

There were many things she did not understand. It was as if the atmosphere inside the wall was stifling her. Too many people in too small an enclosure, all of them thinking and doing the same things. It was as if inside this wall, which surrounded the camp, anything might happen. Apparently the incredible did. The dance, and winning the prize. That afternoon with David Milne. But she wanted to get outside the wall and think—put things in their proper places.

Of course she could go to the village. She had already been there, marketing with Mrs. Adams one afternoon. But there was all that money in the office. More than two hundred pesos. More than seventy-five dollars. And there was Saturday and Sunday with nothing to do. Anne decided to go to Parral. She could take the morning train, stay at the hotel—there would surely be a hotel in Parral—and come back on Sunday.

To an unprejudiced observer, Parral would have been nothing more than a small Mexican town or city, drowsing in

the early March sunlight, but to Anne it was enchanted ground. David Milne had wrapped it in glamour for her. David Milne, with his unruly dark hair and his straightforward gray eyes. She sighed faintly. She wished he were here to share it with her.

The little, gray, fuzzy burros with their huge loads of wood. The dim shops that smelled of newly watered dust and French perfumes—apparently in Mexico, if you wanted to sweep, you first took your sprinkling can and watered your floor as if it were a flower garden. The market place, where the vendors of beans and chili and pottery all squatted on mats and shouted for you to buy their wares. A street orchestra that played an aching melody on an ancient harp, and more ancient violins.

David could have told her so much about these things. He could have bargained for her in the market place. Some of the pottery was nice, the gray water jug with the blue stripes. And then those enormous brown clay jars with the wide mouths. Of course, she could never have taken one of those back to Santa Cruz, but they were like the ones in which Ali Baba had hidden the forty thieves.

She had thought of David, often, in the days since she had gone to his house and washed the dishes. Of course, she realized she must not think of him. He was engaged to Miss Norcross. The unimportant Anne Otts of the world had no place in his existence, she knew, yet whenever she saw the monkeylike old Vicente pottering around the garden, as he had potted that afternoon when she went to deliver the Green Monster; whenever she saw David striding past the tennis courts on his way from work, she wondered how the poem about the Virgin was going, and if he had really used her as his inspiration for Young April.

It was thrilling to think that some day she would open a magazine and see David's poem about spring winds and the shy violets raising their blue faces. She would clip it out and carry it with her always. It would be her poem. All she

would have of David except a memory of an afternoon when he had sat in a kitchen chair and shared his dreams and desires with her; of an evening when the red hearts had pulsed above them, and when the orchestra had played an old fashioned waltz—their waltz.

In camp that was plain. She faced it and accepted it. But here in Parral it seemed that the wraith of David walked beside her, pointing to the church—yes, that must be the one, where mass had been said over the mutilated body of the most renowned bandit in northern Mexico—telling her that the house from which they shot Pancho Villa was below the plaza as you drove into town.

Anne had no idea how to get to this particular plaza, but she asked in a dry goods store, where, in the window along with black shawls and dreadful straw hats wreathed in pink cotton roses, there was a sign  *Ici on parle Francaise*, and, under it, *English spoken*.

Evidently the clerk was better at French than he was at English, and not so good at either, but between the two languages and much gesticulating from the other clerks on the force she had a garbled idea that she was to go past the Foreign Club—wherever that was—and turn to the right.

The streets of Parral are ancient and twisted. They have no fixed pattern. They ramble and turn and end in strange, blind alleys. They lead into blank white walls below jutting iron balconies. After half an hour of trying to follow the clerk's directions, Anne realized she was lost.

She tried to find her way back to the center of town by the chiming of the bells. But all the churches echoed the same chimes. Dozens of bells struck the half and the quarter hours.

She tried to persuade herself that she had passed this doorway, or that one. That this pink house or that blue one looked familiar, but actually she had no idea where she was. She tried to ask passersby for directions. A bent old crone in a rusty shawl, a small boy with a gamin face and a boot-black's box, who was whistling *It Ain't Gonna Rain No*

*More*—surely he would understand her—a gallant with a twisted mustache.

They were all courteous and more than willing to help—even to the gallant who pointed with his cane and offered Anne his arm, which frightened her so that she took the opposite direction. But not one of them spoke English.

She was frankly alarmed. The rays of the sun were beginning to slant across the flat roofs. She might wander until dark and still not be able to find her way. By daylight Parral was enchanting, but, at night—she shuddered. Heaven knew what unknown terrors these walls might conceal.

Bandits, perhaps, although David—this was the first time she had called him David even in her thoughts—had said that the day of the bandit was over. Robbers then, although she had nothing that a robber would want, now that the Green Monster had gone back to its owner—and to Constance Norcross. Assassins! They might lurk in the patios behind these dark doorways. If only one of those carriages with the jingling bells would come along. She could order the driver to take her to the hotel. "Hotel," she could repeat until he understood. But no such conveyance appeared.

For no reason at all she turned to the left. One direction was as good as another now. She suddenly found herself in a more imposing neighborhood. Silver knockers ornamented the doors. The houses were newly whitewashed. The iron balconies were elaborately grilled. Perhaps English would be spoken here. And then she saw a car slide up to the curb and a fat form climb out. Henry Norcross! No doubt about it. But it couldn't be, miracles didn't happen—even in Parral.

She did not hesitate a second. She ran across the street and almost into his arms. "Oh, Mr. Norcross, I'm so glad—I was lost." Then she realized that two other men were getting out of the car. The dark, good-natured Mr. Adams—and David Milne!

The rest of the evening was, for Anne, an especially arranged Arabian night. Mr.

Norcross did not seem to feel that she had intruded on their masculine gathering. He had been more than hearty in his greeting.

"Well, well. If it isn't our little Miss Ott. Lost in Parral, huh! Well, that's what little girls get who come over here alone! The next time you want to go poking around you tell me and I'll send an escort along. Come on boys, and we'll buy her a drink. A double Martini's what the little girl needs."

It appeared that they were all in front of the Foreign Club, which Anne had hunted so futilely. It also appeared that the three of them had come over to Parral on business, but in Henry Norcross's code business was not allowed to interfere with his afternoon drink. The potted palms in the Foreign Club patio swished stiffly in the late afternoon breeze. The waiter, in his white coat, suggested that the lady might like a Pink Garter to quench her thirst, but Henry Norcross was firm.

"Not on your life, Pete. How do you get that way? Trying to palm off your mixtures on us, are you? Four double Martinis, and bring 'em quick."

Mr. Adams and David were silent until their drinks came, but after the first sip or two they all three began to laugh at Anne's adventures, and somehow—perhaps it was the effect of the unaccustomed cocktail—Anne began to feel witty and brilliant. Her wanderings of the afternoon took on the aspect of a saga. Her description of the whistling bootblack sent the men into roars of laughter.

"So you thought he could speak English just because he was whistling something that sounded like *It Ain't Gonna Rain No More*. Don't you let one of those boys take you in that way again! That's a Mexican tune, even if it does sound like one of ours. Hey, Pete, bring the check!

"No, boys, it's on me." He signed it with a flourish of his plump hand. "Now I'll tell you what we'll all do," Henry Norcross went on blithely, "Paul and I have got to go up to the mine, but mines aren't any place for mill men, so David

here can take you around to pick up your suitcase and get tidied up—no reflection on your appearance, Miss Ott, but I always notice that the ladies like to—and then the four of us will have dinner over at Dona Carmen's place. Have you ever had any real Mexican food? Well, Dona Carmen makes the best enchiladas in the State of Chihuahua."

He took it for granted that they would all fall in with his plan, but he did it in such a bluff, cheery fashion that his command seemed like an invitation. Anne was delighted, and said so. She had no desire to be alone in Parral again. Paul Adams and David seemed equally pleased.

"Right! Then Dona Carmen's at seven. When we get through dinner we might go over to the plaza for a while and then we'll drive home. We are not going to take a chance on having you lost again, Miss Ott. We have to educate those kids of ours at Santa Cruz and we have to have a school teacher for that."

But even Henry Norcross' plans sometimes went astray. When he left them at the hotel, David said, "Wait, Miss Ott, do you really want to go and get your suitcase now? There's plenty of time. Let's take a *coche* and drive to the top of the hill and watch the sunset."

The constraint of their last meeting in the club was gone. He was as natural as he had been that afternoon at his house. "Parral, like Rome, is built on hills," he said, "but we can see the sun set behind them."

The bells on the ancient carriages tinkled drowsily, and the chimes from the churches struck the hour of vespers. The hills turned blue, then violet. The shadows crept about the houses of the town below. In the soft dusk, lights came out one by one, beginning at the Hill of the Cross, with the illuminated entrance to the mine shaft.

"There is your Bagdad, Miss Ott. If it were only summer—after the rainy season—all those bare hills would be covered with thick green grass and primroses."

Anne wondered if she would ever see the primroses of Parral, if she could ever



again think of it as Bagdad without wanting David beside her. David, who made things so beautiful with a sentence, a word.

At Dona Carmen's they found a message. "The *Señor Gordo*," Carmen grinned, showing all of her white teeth, "your fat *Señor Norcross* has been detained. But you will dine as his guests and meet him in the plaza at half-past ten o'clock."

So David and Anne sat alone at a green iron table in a lantern-lit patio, where white rabbits scuttled across the stone floor and begged for lettuce leaves. Where two old men played dominoes at the only other table, and a stringed orchestra played love songs. Were there always love songs in Mexico, Anne wondered? Were there always orchestras wrapped in blankets, who, for a small coin, could turn your heart inside out?

They ate Dona Carmen's enchiladas, which burned Anne's tongue and her throat. But she didn't mind. The white wine cooled her palate, and David was telling her about his days as a young engineer at Santa Cruz.

About the time the bandits had almost captured him, but had let him go because his miner's boots and khaki were so disreputable that they had decided he would not bring a worth-while ransom. He did not say anything about his subsequent experiments or triumphs, and Anne, who had heard something of these from the admiring Scotti, liked David for his modesty.

Then the plaza. *The Paseo*. Strings of colored lights and a band. Bright dresses, fine shawls, here and there a lace mantilla. The girls and their chaperones parading on the inside like a revolving wheel of color, and, on the outside, rotating in the other direction, the swains of the town.

"Do you know," David said suddenly as they watched the crowd, "I have an idea for a story. One of these girls for the heroine. She can't ever get out of the house without her *duenna*. The only time she can see her lover is at the plaza, or when he stands below her barred window

at night to play the bear, as they call it down here.

"Think of the possibilities of that. They're young. They're in love. They're modern enough to want to know what the other thinks, not just what he or she looks like. The problem will be for them to find a way to meet without shocking their families, to defy centuries of customs—in a nice way."

"What about the church?" Anne suggested. "Couldn't they go there chaperoned by your Virgin of the Candles?"

"That's an idea. I wonder if a girl down here is allowed to go to church alone. I suppose, if worse came to worse, she could take a sympathetic old servant along. I think I will have a try at that story. I can't seem to make a go of poetry."

The gaily colored crowd was beginning to thin. The band, who had lingered over *My Old Love*, Mexico's beloved *Mi Viejo Amor*, were now packing their instruments. David looked at his watch, "Ten minutes of eleven. Henry's late, and I'm glad of it. There'll be a moon in another half an hour or so, and we can drive home by that."

Exactly as the clocks were striking eleven, they heard Henry Norcross boom behind them, "Sorry, Miss Ott, but a miner never knows when he's going to get off shift, and Adams and I aren't through yet. If you think I can trust you with David, I'll turn the car over to him, and he can drive you home tonight. By the way, Dave, tell Connie to have it down at the station for us tomorrow. We'll try to catch the morning train."

"But, Mr. Norcross—"

"Never mind, young lady. I know what you're going to say. That you can take the train. So you could, but David has to get back to camp, and it's a long walk."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### BOARD MEETING

**M**RS. ADAMS and Mrs. Brooks were pretending to drink ice tea. The tea, made by Liela herself, flavored with fresh lime juice and topped



with sprigs of fresh mint, was excellent. Yet neither Liela nor her guest were enjoying it.

"I feel," Frances Adams said, "as if the whole miserable business were my fault!"

"No more than it is mine," said Liela, stirring the ice in her glass round and round with a spoon. "It's probably the heat that makes us both so conscience stricken. And this fearful dust. If only the rains would come."

"Well, the rains couldn't change this," Frances remarked, in an irritable tone that was not at all like her. "Only an act of God could do that now! She'll never hold up her head again down here, after the special board meeting, no matter what they decide. And, of course, the news will leak out and she'll hear of it, no matter how quiet we try to keep it. Everything leaks out in this beastly place."

Liela picked up the chattering macaw, high perch and all, "I'm going to put this bird in the kitchen. He gets on my nerves."

Nerves! They all had them at this time of year, Frances Adams reflected. Even the natives and the doctor, who shook their heads and predicted that unless the rain came the fever would. The river below the village had dried to an unclean trickle of water.

She walked to the window. The usually clear air was blurred as if by a fog rising from the valley below. The pink and white sweet William in Liela's garden were struggling valiantly to hold up their parching heads. The new grass, seared from the sun, looked like blondened hair, too long untinted.

Well, this was the end of May, thank heaven. A few more weeks of crackling tempers and snapping nerves, and the rains would come. The camp, somewhat remorseful for the follies committed in the name of the weather, would settle down into a more kindly routine. It always happened. She had watched it year after year, that May madness which fastened upon Santa Cruz, making them all behave like snarling animals instead

of human beings. It was an unalterable part of the picture.

It had to be accepted philosophically, she supposed, like the indolence of the natives. Usually she accepted it that way and was amused at the antics of her fellow prisoners, walled in by heat and dust and ill-feeling. But this year—

"If only we hadn't given that party."

"I'm not so sure," Liela replied, shutting the door into the dining room. "Now both doors are closed, and he can chatter his head off. The same thing might have happened anyway."

The party was the one they had given two months ago to launch Miss Ott. It had become part of camp history. Anne Ott in her demure blue taffeta, the center of the party. So far so good. Her hostess had intended that she should be. David, absentmindedly calling Connie, Catherine, all evening.

"Why do you suppose he did that?" Frances asked for the hundredth time. "Do you think it had anything to do with the rest of the business?"

"I think it was only unhappy coincidence," Liela laughed reminiscently. "She did look like Catherine the Great, sitting there in that brocade dress and flashing her emerald all over the place every time she dealt a hand."

"Darling, she did. But don't be far-fetched. What could Catherine of Russia have to do with the problem in hand. You know I hate that ring and I believe David does, too. If I were superstitious I'd say that darn Green Monster was the cause of all the bad luck. Anne Ott brought it down with her—that's why she went to David's house. That's why I invited them all to supper that first night, and that's when I decided we must have a campaign in favor of her."

"Now you're being far-fetched, Frances. I suppose it was the Green Monster that made her go to Parral."

Frances sighed. "What on earth do you suppose possessed her to go alone? If she had only told one of us! Paul says, and I believe him, that she suddenly shot up from nowhere just as they were parking in front of the Foreign Club and that

she was scared to death. She'd been lost.

"He insists that it was Henry Norcross who invited her in and then arranged about the evening, and that David didn't have a thing to do with it. That it was Henry who told David to drive her home."

"Oh, I believe it. The little Ott isn't capable of any deep-dyed plans, and neither is David. But try and make Connie see that—or the rest of the camp!" She lifted her glass wearily. "Is something wrong with this tea, or is it just my imagination?"

"Not a thing, darling. I'm going to help myself to some more. If only those men had kept their mouths shut!" She could still see her husband and Henry Norcross teasing Anne about being lost in Parral, telling the rest of the bridge party how amusing her account of the whistling boot-black had been.

Then Henry's, "They tried to palm off Pink Garters on you at the Foreign Club, didn't they, Miss Ott? But we wouldn't let them! No, sir. David and I were looking out for you that night."

Connie's contorted face. Evidently that was the first she had heard of the Parral episode. The uplifted eyebrows of the more puritanical women in camp. And now the board meeting. Henry Norcross had reappointed Miss Ott for the next year—and the school-board, composed of all the families with children in camp, had objected. There was to be a meeting tonight.

"Do you mind if I smoke one of your cigarettes, Liela? The ones in my case taste musty. The point is, what can we do? Do you suppose it would help to go to Henry?"

Liela shook her dark red head. "Not a bit. He's for her anyway. I meant to tell you, but this heat makes me forget everything. Tom came home at noon and said that Connie had been over to her father's office raising the very devil.

"They both got so angry that Tom could hear every word. She wanted her father to promise that he would get rid of the little Ott. Henry said he was damned if he would. She was a damn

nice kid and a damn fine school teacher. You know Henry when he's angry!"

"Nice daughter he has," Frances commented.

"Anyway, we can depend on him. It's the women. First that Parral business, and then Connie quarreling with David and her attitude toward Ott. They think little Ott is behind the whole business, which she probably is, without meaning to be. Ergo, if she can come between two newly engaged fiancés she must be a dangerous woman. A siren. A vampire. If she has that effect on a young man in love, what would she do to a disillusioned husband, simply pining for trouble? That's their platform!

"It would probably be ours, if we were like some of the old battle-axes that are still clinging to matrimony down here. And David hasn't been such a help either. Look at the way he's mooned about and shut himself up while the rest of us were disporting ourselves on the village green, so to speak."

"And," Frances added, "if Connie had only come out in the open and called little Ott a few healthy names everything would have been cleared up, but she was too smart for that. Tight-lipped martyrdom, so all the other women would suspect the worst! Scotti went to her and told her she was being a rotten sport, which, of course didn't help. All we can do now is to put up a good fight tonight. At least, the children adore Anne, and Henry's on our side. I'll make a speech about the improved mental conditions among the younger set and then try to appeal to the higher instincts of parenthood."

"As if there were any, in this weather," Liela murmured. "Tommy could run as wild as a red Indian, so long as he didn't bother me."

"Well, darling, Brooks-Adams, Ltd., has never been defeated yet, and we've come pretty close to it a good many times before this. The pass word is Forward to Victory. What is that cat doing?"

Maximillian, who had been asleep on a cushion, had leaped off the couch and was scratching at the dining-room door.

Liela got up languidly, "Somebody trying to come in. Max has good ears."

A moment later she brought in Anne Ott, a tired, pale Anne, whose blue eyes looked twice too large for her face. There was a new and poignant dignity about her, Frances thought, as if she had lived and living had hurt. She was no longer the blushing and ingenuous little school teacher who had come to Santa Cruz three months ago. Rather, in her unaffected white dress she suggested now a nun—cool, aloof—who has put the world, however reluctantly, behind her.

"This is a lovely room," she said, as she sank back against the apricot chintz of the couch. "It seems to keep the heat away."

"I wish it could," Liela replied. "Ice tea? And don't let Max bother you." The amber cat had curled up against Anne's knee and was purring stentoriously. "Tommy says Max thinks we're all Eskimoes."

Anne said slowly, "You know, you have both been very good to me. I never knew there could be anything like the fun you have. The parties, the dances. That Valentine dance. I won't ever forget that!

"I'm not good at saying such things. I can tell you two, because I know you better than the rest. But I would like them all to know." Her voice caught. "You see, I have appreciated everything."

Frances wanted to get up and put her arms around that slim white child on the couch. Appreciating everything—when those nasty cats were sharpening their claws for tonight.

"So I wonder," Anne went on a little more smoothly, "if you would tell them at the board meeting. I couldn't! Thank them—and—tell—they I would like to come back, but I can't. And, if you don't mind, I won't even tell you why," she finished simply, "the reason is so very personal."

When Anne had gone, Frances stood at the window with her back resolutely to the room, and Liela hunted, somewhat suspiciously, for a handkerchief.

"Frances, she doesn't even suspect—about the purpose of the meeting."

"I know it, and thank goodness for that. But what a couple of fools we've been not to guess. The Valentine dance. Reason for not coming back 'so very personal' she couldn't tell us. Oh, Liela, I could cry my eyes out. She's not the kind to fall in love more than once—and David is so sweet!"

## CHAPTER NINE

### THE CZAR OF SANTA CRUZ

**B**EING superintendent of Santa Cruz was not unlike being Czar of Russia, when Russia had a Czar. With this difference, that a superintendent could, and Henry Norcross did, keep in touch with the lives and behaviour of each one of his subjects.

Even Mesdames Brooks and Adams were not more conversant with what went on in camp than Connie's father. He had sources of information which would have surprised even these two alert ladies.

The doctor for example. As a doctor in a mining camp is paid by the company, not by his patients, it does not profit him to have a long list of the ailing. And Doctor Hilyard worked on the theory that it was his job to keep the camp well, physically—and mentally.

So when he discovered discontent he reported it to Henry Norcross exactly as if he would have reported a case of mumps. Chronic homesickness, he insisted, could do as much harm in Mexico as a chronic appendix. Henry Norcross agreed with him, so, between them, they sometimes administered some strange prescriptions.

On the particular morning when Anne Ott was to leave, the Czar of Santa Cruz was far from satisfied with the state of camp health. That school board meeting last night. Those pious frauds all sitting there ready to tear little Miss Ott and her reputation to pieces. Parents. Fine lot of parents they were! How would they feel if their daughter had been in the school teacher's shoes?

Henry sighed as he struggled into his shirt. He liked a good fight, and he'd been all ready to put one on when Fran-

ces Adams and her side-kick had come in with the news that Miss Ott wanted to resign. That took the wind out of their sails—but not out of Henry's. He didn't know what he intended to do about Miss Ott, but he intended to do something, and it had to be done today. He wasn't going to let her leave camp under a cloud, eating her heart out for poor Dave Milne—that's what Doc Hilyard said was the matter with her, and the doctor seldom made a mistake in diagnosis—not that nice little girl. She deserved a better break.

At this point in Henry's reflections, he discovered that his shirt was practically without benefit of buttons. He let out a bellow which brought Ching padding into the big, bare room. In his own quarters, Henry liked plenty of space to move around in—indeed his bulk demanded it—and no "gew-gaws."

"Is Miss Constance up?" Ching said no, that she was having coffee and orange juice in bed. "Well, you tell her to put on a kimono"—Connie had never been able to educate her stout parent into calling dressing gowns or negligees anything but kimonoas—"and get herself out into the dining room. I want to talk to her."

Probably Henry's temper would have improved if the second shirt he had pulled out of the high, unadorned chest of drawers had not been somewhat frayed of cuff. But by the time he arrived in the dining room he was in no state to notice his daughter's regal appearance in trailing periwinkle chiffon, nor to spare her feelings.

"Look here, Connie, you don't have a damn thing to do but see to the house-keeping!" he began peremptorily. "There are enough servants eating their heads off around this house to keep the Prince of Wales well dressed. And then I can't find a shirt with a button on it. Fine state of affairs when the superintendent has to go to his office looking like a ragged peon!"

This was a slight exaggeration. To all appearances, the Superintendent of Santa Cruz was immaculately turned out in a light gray summer suit and faultless linen. But he so seldom reproved any member of his own household that he was thor-

oughly enjoying himself—and he meant to keep on.

Constance Norcross herself was not feeling entirely at the top of the morning. If there was one thing she disliked more than any other, it was to get up for breakfast. And last night—what a wash-out that had been! While the rest of the camp had gone to the school-board meeting she and David had been alone. There had been a cool evening breeze and a tender young moon. There had been wicker chairs and cushions on the long screened porch. Delicious iced drinks. A perfect stage setting, in fact, with Connie in a frock delicately pastel enough to melt any man's heart.

But had David made love to her? He had not! He had talked about reagents and a new experiment he had in mind. There were times when she was tempted to break her engagement. Being married to David Milne wasn't going to be so hot. If it hadn't been for living in New York—

But she did not want her father to suspect any of this. Constance Norcross hated to admit defeat, even in the bosom of the family. So she remarked coolly, "If you're through talking about those tiresome buttons, I'll go back to bed and finish my coffee in peace!"

"You will not!" Her parent snapped. "I'm expecting people to lunch, and you'd better get dressed, so that you can see that this place is in some kind of shape. They're coming over from Los Amigos Mines, to talk milling. There will be three of them."

"Milling," Connie echoed, "then I suppose David will be here, too."

Something in her tone made Henry look at his daughter. So that was how the land lay. But all he said was, "Dave? Sure. Why not?"

"No reason at all," Connie replied listlessly, "except that sometimes I think I'll scream if I hear the word mill again!"

Henry, to whom conversation about mines and mills was more enthralling than any other topic in the world, lied gallantly. "I know just how you feel. And, by the way, as long as it's Miss Ott's last

day, we might as well have her. No use in her eating a lonesome lunch up at the club before the train leaves. And that will give you somebody to talk to."

"Miss Ott? Dad, you're out of your mind! She wouldn't fit in. That stupid little thing. Of course we won't have her!"

Henry Norcross choked over a large bite of toast and was about to say something violent, but he changed his mind. "You're right, Connie. You usually are. I must say you know your own mind better than most women. I'll speak to Ching as I go out. But see that we have something decent to eat, will you? That's a good girl!"

"You know," he added unexpectedly, "I've been worried about you. You're a spoiled youngster, Constance, but you're all I've got, and I want you to be happy."

"Dad, why I—"

"Now don't try to put anything over on me! I've got eyes in my head, and Doc Hilyard told me yesterday he thought you needed a tonic. I told him you hadn't taken a tonic since you were six and had the measles."

Henry Norcross had started, and he meant to find out, here and now, the state of his daughter's feelings. If she was in love with David Milne, all right. If she wasn't, he wanted to know it, this morning, before Miss Ott left camp.

"Look here, Connie, I'm coming out with this, man to man. You know I'm not in favor of young people rushing off to the preacher, and then rushing around for a divorce before ink on the wedding license is dry. I was all for you marrying David Milne. But the more I think about you and Dave the less I think he's the man for you.

"The trouble is," Henry muttered darkly, "he doesn't begin to understand you. And I'm darned if I'm going to sit by and watch any man make you unhappy. That would just about break your old father's heart."

Early morning to the contrary, Connie was not impervious to sympathy. She had never made confidants of any of the women in camp, and since she and David

had been engaged she had naturally seen little of the men. So Connie had been lonely, because in the last few weeks David had been more of a manual on inilling than a lover or a companion.

"You may be right," she agreed almost humbly. "He isn't half as much fun as you are, dad. But we're engaged. And that's that!"

Henry Norcross shouted loudly for another fried egg, and simulated great indignation, "Taking you away from me, and all the people you know. From the kind of a place you've been brought up in. He ought to have sense enough to see that a woman needs something beside chemicals to make her happy! I'll attend to that young whippersnapper!"

"Listen, dad, don't be silly. If you say anything it will make an awful mess. I can take care of it!"

Henry digested his egg thoughtfully, "You women are all alike. You think you know what life's about, and you stick your necks out. Then what happens? You get married when you're just about out of your cradles, and you lose your looks, and are bored to death with some young cub who isn't worth your little finger. On the other hand, if you'd have waited the right man would have come along!"

He could see that his daughter appreciated being told that most men weren't worth her little finger. He also knew—knowing his daughter—that if he managed things properly, Connie could be depended upon to add the finishing touches. He sighed, "No, I won't do a thing, but I want you to promise your old dad you won't either—until you're sure. Dave's all right, but you need a bigger man—one who'll go right up, take you with him, out of these damned mills and mines!"

"And I'll tell you what, Connie, I thought I might get a little vacation. Say three months. We might go to Mexico City and then over to England. Maybe we could even go to Paris and buy you some pretties!" He wiped his mouth vigorously, in token that his duties were calling him.

Henry Norcross was genuinely fond of Constance. She was, as he had said, all he

had, and he was ready to do battle for her any day—if he was sure that it would make her happy. But Henry was shrewd about even his own flesh and blood. He suspected that David Milne was not in love with his daughter. Therefore, David would hardly make a good husband for her, because Henry realized, better than any man on earth, that Connie was neither educated nor prepared to make the best of a bad bargain. And as long as he knew definitely now that she wasn't in love with David, as far as Henry Norcross went, that settled the matter.

According to Doc Hilyard, Dave and little Miss Ott were pretty far gone on each other. Henry didn't know exactly how he was going to make that work out, but he intended to have a try. His first move was to telephone Scotti. He could trust Scotti, who had a poker mind as well as a poker face. But, even so, he had no intention of allowing the old eagle-beak to know the true state of affairs.

It was later in his office that Scotti faced him.

Norcross chewed an excellent cigar and offered its twin to Scotti. "Any trouble in the mill today?"

Scotti said there was none.

"Then you've got to make some. I've got some visitors coming up from Los Amigos, and they'll want to talk to Dave Milne. They don't need to know what kind of experiments we go in for over here. But you see how it is, Scotti, it wouldn't look right if I didn't appear friendly, and let them do all the question asking they want."

Scotti nodded. This was the unwritten law in mining camps.

"Now I can't figure out anything better than to keep Dave out of the way until they're fed, and we get them going back to their own home territory." Henry Norcross appeared to be thinking, "But I guess they'll want to inspect the mill after lunch."

Then he pretended to have a sudden inspiration. "I tell you what you do, Scotti. About one-thirty you remember that I was kind of worried about the school teacher getting down to the train.

You send Dave home to wash up and tell him I said to drive her down in my car. If he's taking Miss Ott to the train they can't ask him any questions!"

Scotti admitted that they couldn't. But behind his enigmatic countenance, which looked more than ever like an eagle's with a broken beak, he was turning over certain theories in his mind. Miss Ott. David Milne driving her to the train. Connie Norcross. What would she do? Well, it was up to him to carry out orders, and, anyway, he was all for little Miss Ott. If she had ever thought that an old mill man would make a good husband—well, she hadn't. But maybe she wouldn't feel that way about a young mill man, not one like Dave.

Scotti didn't know just what the Old man, as the camp familiarly referred to its superintendent, was up to. You never could tell with Henry Norcross. But he had an idea of his own. It was worth trying out. So he said, "Sure, I'll get David down to the train if I have to use some of the company's dynamite. But I've been thinking.

"It's kind of a pity to let the little girl go off like this. That there school board! To my notion, they ain't much better than a bunch of skunks. All but Mrs. Adams and Mrs. Brooks. They done their best all along. Now, if you was to ask one of them two ladies how she'd like to have a visitor for a while maybe we could keep Miss Ott here in camp for a week or so, till things kind of blow over.

"We might even fix it to give her a party up at the club. The boys would all chip in, and I made a little extra cash for the club fund playing poker the other night—" Scotti paused embarrassed.

The Old Man thumped his desk with a huge paw of a hand, "You're a genius, Scotti! Now, get on over and find Dave. If he isn't in his office, send out a search party! And I'll see to the rest."

That was how it happened that Mr. Norcross' next move—which would have annoyed his daughter to the point of speechlessness, had she known of it—was to send for Frances Adams. Still chewing on his long-suffering cigar he explained

as much of the situation, as he saw fit, to her. Not that he needed to do much explaining. Frances always knew whatever there was to know, and a little more.

"Now listen to me, Frances, if you or Liela Brooks ever so much as mention what you've heard this morning, in my office, both your husbands will be out of jobs!"

Frances laughed, "All right, Henry, as long as our bread and butter depends on it, I suppose we can keep quiet for this once! And, as I see it, what you want me to do is to stay home until David comes over from the mill to wash his hands and face. Then I'm to go separate him from his cake of soap, and out of the kindness of my heart share the meagre Adams lunch with him.

"Meantime, Liela is to find the school teacher and try and persuade her that traveling would be much more attractive a week or so from now than it will be today. The rains may have broken by that time, and it will be cooler. That's the idea, isn't it Henry? Well, then I'm off!"

Henry Norcross did not believe in fate. His theory was that you had to make your own arrangements and see that they were carried out. He had made these arrangements and delegated them to thoroughly reliable henchmen. But had Henry only realized it, fate intended to help his good intentions along with a bit of manuscript and a letter. Scarcely more than a short note, but, as it proved, a most effective one.

## CHAPTER TEN

### CANDLES FOR THE VIRGIN

**D**AVID MILNE'S work in Santa Cruz was finished. Actually, it had been over weeks ago, but the New York office had asked him to stand by until such time as his experiments showed tangible results. If they had only let him go when he had sent in his reports none of this unpleasantness would have occurred. He would have been back in New York. The Norcrosses would have come up in May as they had originally planned. A quiet wedding, and he

and Connie would have been settled in his house in the East Seventies.

There would have been none of this upsetting chatter and gossip of the last few weeks. Connie's nerves would not have been on edge—May in Santa Cruz, he had noticed, usually had that effect on women—she would not have suspected him of heaven knew what.

The telephone in the little glass house behind the mill was wheezing and snorting like an airedale with the distemper.

"Answer that, will you?" David Milne called to his assistant, "and whoever it is, tell them I'm busy."

David wasn't busy. There was nothing else important for him to do, but he was in no mood for the vagaries of Mexican telephones, nor the people who might be talking over them.

"Señor, it is the Señorita Norcross, and she desires to speak to you personally." David got off a high stool and reluctantly went over to the telephone. "David," Connie was saying, "father is having some visiting firemen in for lunch today. I don't know who they are, but somebody impressive, from the way he barked orders at Ching. Twelve-thirty, dear. They ought to be here by that time. They're motoring up."

Motoring up, were they? Visiting firemen, were they? Probably somebody from another mining camp who were having the same troubles that Santa Cruz was having, who would want to be shown through the mill, who would come into his laboratory and ask about this and that.

"Connie, I'm sorry. I don't think I can make it. I'm working on something here."

"David, there are times when you are exasperating. Well, if you get through, come on over. If you don't, let me know." She hung up. She was annoyed. Again. Connie was frequently annoyed these days. It was probably the weather. The heat. The dust. The feeling that something was hanging over you—which never happened.

David put on his coat and took his hat off a peg on the wall. "If anybody calls up, don't say I've gone. Just take the



message. Say that I'm busy. That's all."

"Si, Señor."

"And I'll be back when I get here."

"Si, Señor."

David walked passed the mill, which was growling like an omnivorous monster waiting for victims, passed the Pay Office where the peons lounged in the sun. But he didn't go into the camp proper. Connie might see him—or any of a dozen pair of sharp eyes.

Instead, he followed the white wall where it circled behind the club and the bachelors' quarters, and then he left it and began to climb the hill, passed the scrub oaks to the reservoir, low as always at this season—from the drought.

He sat on its hot cement rim and tried to think. Anne Ott was leaving this afternoon. . . .

Down below him lay the camp, shimmering white and green in the hot sunlight. In the distance, the Mexican village unrolled, a mirage-like design, tiny houses, pastel-shaded, and purple smoke—beyond them the blue of the mountains with the early morning shadows still clinging to them.

Those mountains, where the bandits had hidden when he was a young engineer. He had told Anne about them, that day when his arm was hurt. The day she had come down to his house and washed the dishes. The day after the Valentine's masquerade, when she had worn a white velvet costume and that ridiculous lace veil. Young April. She had been Young April, but he would never write that poem now. Anne Ott was leaving.

Then Parral. The fat-faced yellow moon that had come up over the black velvet hills. The night wind that had blown Anne's soft brown hair across her face. She was such a little thing, Anne Ott. She had been as frightened as the long-eared rabbit when it had run in front of their car, its eyes gleaming green in the headlights.

Green, David thought, like Connie's emerald. He had laughed when he had heard that they had called it the Green Monster in the office on the border. He didn't laugh now. He hated that ring, and

all the bad luck it had brought. Of course, that was ridiculous. How could an emerald bring bad luck any more than a nugget of gold. Still—

And Anne Ott was leaving this afternoon, on the four o'clock train, and there was nothing he could do. He was engaged to Connie Norcross, and he must be in love with her or he never would have asked her to marry him.

Connie would make a splendid wife. There was no doubt about that. She would entertain the right people, just as she was entertaining them today. She would help him to the top in his career. But what would she think when she found his scribbled bits of poetry and his pathetic attempts at stories?

He pulled a loose leaf note-book out of his pocket and thumbed its pages until he came to the place. It was part of the story he had told Anne about that night in Parral. Those two young things, hemmed in by relatives and by custom, who must find a way to meet. It was not expertly done, but David felt it had its points.

He reread the letter from his hero to his heroine, which happened to be on a separate page from the rest. Not quite enough suspense. There should be some hint of a future meeting. He added a few sentences and read it again. "My own beloved—I have been in church. I have sat on the bench where you always sit—" Should it be bench or pew? David was not sure which would be orthodox in Mexico. He would have to ask the Padre the next time he saw him. David and the Padre were great friends. They discussed dead and gone philosophers under the rustling cottonweed trees of the plaza.

He went on with the letter; "At the *siesta* hour, I find that the church is dim, with only the light from a solitary candle below the Virgin, and empty, except for now and then an ancient penitent who would not recognize us. Your saints, looking down from their niches, will pity you and me, and not censure us, I am sure, when our hearts are so full of love and pain for one another."

A bit sentimental, David reflected, but



then he was dealing with the Latin and not the Anglo-Saxon mind. The P. S. was more direct and to the point; "I will expect, then, to meet you at our accustomed hour." The letter had done the trick. He would work on his story, or he would go back to the laboratory, but he was not going to have lunch with the visiting firemen—not today. Vicente would take a note to Connie for him. Then he would go over after lunch, so that she would understand.

They wouldn't miss him, with all that gang. Ching would probably be relieved that there was one less guest. And Henry Norcross. Henry was a swell old guy. He wanted people to do what made them the most comfortable.

David crunched down to camp through the oak bushes, withering in the hot May sun. Vicente was working futilely with plants that refused to grow. Amalia was making such a clatter over the dishes in the kitchen that he suspected her of having been passing the early morning hours in the garden.

As usual, there was no note paper on the desk. He had used up the last and had forgotten to get any more—or Amalia had filched it. He called her in, but, as usual, she had seen nothing of it.

The telephone gave a rheumatic wheeze. David picked it up. It was his assistant. "Señor, something has gone wrong at the mill. I told them that you were busy, but they told me I must hunt until I found you. It is bad, Señor. It is the Señor Scotti who wants you."

"All right, I'll be over in five minutes." David hung up. Something wrong in the mill. What could have gone wrong? The mill was not his job. Experiments were. It must be something serious for Scotti to send for him. He grabbed his hat and then he remembered Connie's luncheon. No writing paper, and this was not the time to argue with her—or any woman. He pulled the note-book out of his pocket and scratched hastily:

Dear: Trouble at the mill. Everything out until after lunch. See you then.

He started to add "sorry," but he wasn't sorry. He simply signed it "David."

He called Vicente in. "Take this over to the Señorita Norcross." He fumbled for an envelop, and, having finally found one, addressed it. "And make sure she gets it. You understand, Señorita Norcross, in the Big House."

"Sí, Señor."

"All right. Don't stand around. Get your old legs on their way. And here's a *tostin*. Buy candles for the Virgin."

Candles for the Virgin. Why had he said that? Ah, yes, that day Anne was here; he had started a poem—and Anne was leaving today. . . .

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### BIRD'S EYE VIEW

ANNE OTT was packing. The brown and white native blanket the children had given her. A Guadalajara pottery water bottle with a startled deer on it, from Mrs. Adams. Half a dozen drawn work handkerchiefs from Mrs. Brooks. The vanity-case she had won at the masquerade. She would carry that in her handbag, so she could make sure that it was safe. Nothing must ever happen to that vanity case. Her grandmother's wedding dress—all of her treasures.

The whitewashed room looked bare and pitiful when she had shut her trunk, although the sun streamed through the windows in just as brilliantly and as cheerily as it had every morning since she came to Santa Cruz. Oh, her alarm clock. She had forgotten that. She opened the lid of the trunk again, and a yellowed fold of the dress slid out, like a memory which refused to be locked and put away.

Anne sat on the floor and touched the velvet to her cheek. The Valentine Masquerade. The throbbing red hearts. A tall man in a cross-word puzzle suit. The orchestra playing of love that would never grow old. The touch of his hand on hers.

Why did she have to think of that now. Some day, when she was old and gray-haired, she might be able to remember

without the memory hurting. Young April. He had called her that. He had said that he was going to write a poem about her. And there was his other poem about the Virgin, alone and unsmiling until the candles were lit.

Well, she couldn't sit here on the floor and dream all day. There were dozens of things to be done. Her ticket. Mr. Norcross had said that his secretary would see to that, but she had to stop at the office and settle up her account. To draw out her money. She had been so proud of saving that money, more than she had ever been able to save before.

And now that money would take her away from Santa Cruz forever. From the hot sunlit days and the warm sunlit nights and the shadows that were like black lace. The rustling of the cottonwood trees—and, yes, the roar of the mill. She would even miss that. She would wake up in the quiet of a Connecticut night and wonder if there had been an accident, if that was why the mill was shut down.

All of which was nonsense. She had decided not to come back—she couldn't, when everything in Santa Cruz would remind her of David Milne. Always David, when she woke up in the morning, when she went to bed at night. The thing to do now was be sensible and go over to the office. She put on her small blue straw hat, locked her trunk and, with the key and the gold vanity-case safe in her purse, she started past the tennis courts and the mill.

It was then that the lines of David's poem came to her.

No candles burned;  
None came to worship.

Why did those lines which David had repeated for her, that afternoon at his house, keep ringing through her mind. Today, when she didn't want to think. She would have plenty of time to think on the train—and for the rest of her life. There would never be anything like this again—no matter how many girls' schools she taught in.

No candles burned;  
None came to worship.

If she hurried she would still have time to go down to the village and get back to the club for a late lunch before the train left. She might burn at least one candle to the Lonely Virgin.

The Padre, David had said, always walked in the plaza—morning and evening. He would tell her how it was done. Perhaps burning the candle would relieve the ache in her heart. Perhaps the Virgin would smile, as in David's poem, and that would mean good luck—just as the Green Monster had meant bad.

It was almost a mile to the village, and it took Anne longer than she had expected. Her oxfords were covered with gray dust, and the same gray dust smarted in her eyes, and made her sneeze. The sun beat down like the heat from a giant, remorseless oven. She hadn't realized how hot it was.

In the camp there was always shade, and she had been in the schoolroom every morning for the last few weeks. No wonder the natives let their children go naked if they had to live in such heat as this.

She passed the market place where the old women drowsed over untidy piles of rotting tomatoes and withered oranges, where the old men were too jaded from the heat to urge the American *Señorita* to buy dried shrimp or the string of sausages that swung above their nodding heads.

Swinging doors, and the blare of a player piano. This was probably where Scotti came to drink beer. Anne wished that she were a man, so that she could go in and throw a silver coin on the counter. Even beer would taste good today.

Around the corner was the plaza. But the Padre, with his broad black hat and his rusty skirts—he looked like a black and white drawing out of the school history, chapter on Spanish Influence in Early California—was not walking there. There was no one about except a wrinkled crone, fanning the flies off her watermelon—pink sweets, with a cow's tail.

The woman was offering her tray of sweets to Anne. But in all this heat what Anne wanted was something cool—cool and soothing. She smiled at the woman as she shook her head and passed into the little church.

Inside the tawdry little church, with its battered saints in blue and red robes, and its splintered floor, it was so dark, after the brilliant light outside, that Anne could scarcely see her way up the aisle to the waxen image, serene and alone in its niche. But it was pleasant to be here in this cool, dim church, which smelled of candle wick and centuries of incense burned. It was pleasant to sit here and rest after the long, dusty walk.

And Anne felt, too, that the Virgin was smiling down at her, even though she had no candle to offer. It gave her a sort of peace to believe that.

She remembered trying to see the face of her wrist-watch, but there was not enough light. She remembered thinking that she ought to go. It was a long way back to camp. And then she didn't remember anything else. She must have dozed, because she did not hear the automobile which stopped in front of the church, nor the footsteps, cautious feminine footsteps, which came up to her, and stopped, and then went out of the church again.

The first thing she was aware of was a touch on her shoulder, and a voice saying, "Anne, please—come outside, where we can talk!" Then she realized that David Milne was standing over her. "Why you funny little thing. You've been asleep!"

It did not seem strange to her that David should be there. To Anne, this was his church. He had discovered the Lonely Virgin. It did not even seem strange to be in the plaza with him, where even the midday chatter of the sparrows was drowsy and the cottonwood leaves rustled like brittle silk.

David wiped off a dusty green iron bench with his handkerchief, and said, "Now, then, my dear, we must hurry."

"Oh, I had forgotten!" Anne felt frantically for her watch. "What time is it—will I miss the train?"

"Never mind the time. There's plenty of it. But you and I are going back to Mrs. Brook's for lunch. She and her girl friend will be popping up any minute now, and before they come there are things I have to tell you."

But he didn't begin telling her at once. He abruptly leaned down and kissed her. "David!" she gasped. Anne felt as if she were walking with the stars and had caught the moon in her hands.

"Never mind telling me that I mustn't kiss you, darling. Because I must. Now and tomorrow, and the next day, until you're eighty-five and I'm a doddering old gent with white whiskers and one crutch."

"But, Connie?"

"It's all right about Connie. That's over. If I had used what brains God gave me, it would have been over before it began. I never was in love with Connie. No, darling, don't interrupt. Of course, I must have thought so at first. But I haven't been, and I'm not, and she knows!"

One Victorian-minded sparrow over their heads confided to her spouse that these Americans did behave in a most unseemly fashion. Kissing one another in the public square at high noon. She did hope her children hadn't seen.

"Connie chose to break the engagement. So that part's all right. She chose to believe that you and I had been meeting every day at the church. And she was absolutely convinced, when she drove down here and found you waiting—"

"But David, how could she believe such a thing?"

"Well," David replied sheepishly. "That was my fault. I wrote her a note on the back of a piece of paper, which was part of a story I had been trying to write. But never mind about that now. I'll explain when we get back to camp. Here come Liela and Frances, and now smile at the ladies nicely. Because you are going to be their house guest for the next few days, until we can get these slow-going Mexican authorities to permit a wedding."

Around the corner from the market

place came the antediluvian contraption which was the Brooks car. It rattled and it snorted. The white paint was peeling off its venerable sides, but Tom Brooks refused to let Liela lacquer it dark blue, or orange, or any other color. Its very lack of care and paint, he insisted, was what made it the most reliable, the only reliable car in camp.

Liela was driving and Frances Adams

was saying to her, "You see, my dear, I was sure of it, Suppose my windows hadn't been open. Suppose I hadn't heard Connie's little—well disagreement. Suppose I hadn't stepped over after she left. David would probably still be sitting there wondering what he ought to do. As it is, one more victory for Adams-Brooks, Ltd.—instead of for the Green Monster!"

*(The End.)*

# Tiger Trail

A ROMANTIC NOVEL OF BIG  
GAME HUNTING IN INDIA

By  
PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

*Frontispiece by*  
AMOS SEWELL



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*Man and tiger had spun from the small building into the open. There Grail followed them.  
(Page 124.)*

# TIGER TRAIL

## CHAPTER ONE

### PLEASURE TENT



HE saw Madame de Gerville again that night. Sight of her gave his heart a little lurch. He was glad now that she was so much older than he was. Although she didn't look it. Really. Slender, lithe, with a touch of red in her hair and warm, dark eyes. Not a bit mannish. To see her now in her misty evening frock it seemed incredible that this was his lady of the tiger-shoot.

Which would be about the last of what they called in India the Maharajah shoots. In British India the open season on tigers ran to April—closed then until November. In the native states the tigers were property of the rulers who could, of course, do with them as they would. But even for them, April was about the end. And this was April. Too hot.

Craig took a step toward Madame de Gerville, then hovered. Shri Bahadur also had been quick to see her. The American watched the Hindu make that pretty gesture of salutation called the *namaskar*—fingertips of the two hands joined and these then brought to lips and forehead.

Just a concession, that was, to some of the other Hindus present—old-timers, a number of them, and gorgeous in satin

and tulle, no end of shimmery gems and pale gold.

If Shri had been in London or Newport—he was popular in both—he'd have kissed the lady's hand. Nor would he have been wearing that picturesque outfit of his own—decked out, as he said himself, like a bird of paradise. Away from home he looked—and dressed and acted—like any other white man. Why not? Oxford, polo, at least two winters at Palm Beach, and that one notable season that Craig's people, the Brandon Craigs, had entertained him at Newport.

Shri Bahadur was Maharajah of Indarabad. This was his shoot.

Brandon Craig smiled in response to a smile and a wave of the hand from Madame de Gerville. She was one of those women who could tell you things from a distance without need of words.

"Wait for me," she'd said. "I like you. We understand each other."

"Indeed we do," said Brandon Craig to himself, patient and mollified.

The air was heavy with attar of roses. A dozen long-armed revolving fans overhead kept it in motion. Craig selected the corner of a divan, European style, in pale yellow silk and seated himself.

Silent as a shadow, a barefooted butler looking more like a warrior but dressed in white, salaamed before him and presented a tray of sparkling glasses. Cham-

pagne. Craig declined. Another white shadow, replica of the first, salaamed and offered a tray with cigarettes. He accepted.

Shri Bahadur certainly knew how to do things in his Oriental unstinted and overwhelming way. One of the richest men in the East. No one knew how rich. And still unmarried. It was rumored that he'd set his heart on marrying an English or American girl. And Brandon Craig felt some faint qualm of distaste, which he banished—or tried to—as unfair.

He'd known Shri practically from childhood. The old maharajah and the general—Craig's grandfather on his mother's side—had been friends, drawn together by mutual interest in Sanskrit and early Aryan art. The general had often brought them, young Brandon and his mother, to Indarabad while the old maharajah was alive.

"And to think," said Brandon Craig to himself, "that I once punched him on the nose!"

He was looking at the maharajah and Madame de Gerville again. They'd turned away from the other guests. They were strolling off a little apart. There was something subtly peremptory in Shri Bahadur's manner, a suggestion of resistance about Madame de Gerville. Though nothing overt, nothing even remotely harsh.

Everything smothered in attar of roses, and now a minor swirl and throb of Indian music—vina, viol, drums and a twinkling cadence of little bells.

This was a nautch. The girl who danced was like an anchored cobra. Her feet barely moved. But from her ankles there came that shiver of silver bells as completely controlled as a cobra's scales.

All this took place in what they called the *shamiana*, the pleasure, or entertainment tent. Something like one of those big pavilions—the society reporters called them *marqueses*—they used to put up on the lawn at Newport. When everybody still had money. Wired also, up-to-date. With a double canvas roof for added coolness.

But big as a ballroom, this one; with a ballroom floor; and around it no end

of pale silk covered furniture and floral hide-outs.

At one end was the *gadi*, or throne; but Shri Bahadur hadn't—and wouldn't occupy it tonight. It was there, that was all—a sort of gold steamer-trunk raised a foot or so above the floor; and the floor all around it for yards covered by a carpet of tiger skins, sewn together, perfectly matched, head-in.

With a little imagination you could imagine twenty couchant tigers, all of them rajahs of their kind, prostrating themselves before the might and the magnificence which were the Maharajah of Indarabad.

He was, Craig reflected, probably the only person now on earth who'd ever punched the Maharajah of Indarabad on the nose and got away with it. His escape at that had been something of a squeak. Shri had tried to kill him, first with a stick, then by shoving him into the lotus-tank. They'd both been seven at the time—eighteen years ago. And something, somehow, of that old feud had lingered. Craig felt it as he came to his feet.

Madame de Gerville and the maharajah were drawing near—strolling, chatting lightly. But Craig could see at once that they'd got too close to some hidden fire. Both were too bright eyed, a little flushed.

Craig made the usual motions of respect. Others were watching. Shri Bahadur responded with a smile and a flutter of his hand. Craig also smiled. But he was suddenly and painfully aware that his smile was solely of the lips. He was aware that so was Shri Bahadur smiling only with his lips.

There'd always been an extraordinary speed of comprehension—or of miscomprehension—between them. Perhaps that's why they'd fought as children, still carried about with them some rankle of that infantile duel—as one, or two, will remember a bit of unfinished business that will have to be finished some time.

"Topping!" said Shri Bahadur pleasantly. "Madame de Gerville tells me you bowled over stripes this morning as if he'd been a hare."



"Easier," said Craig. "We had the poor devil at such a disadvantage!" He softened any hint of criticism. "I know now, Your Highness, why—"

Shri Bahadur broke in softly.

"Save the 'highness' for strangers, Brandy. Madame's as good as a member of the family. I'm Shri. Pardon! You were saying?"

"Why all the other kings and potentates," Brandon Craig went on, "want your invitations when the tiger-fever gets them. Newsreels and heroics, perfect comfort and—a lovely companion."

But Craig had lost interest in his own words. What—he was asking himself—had Shri Bahadur meant by that crack about Madame de Gerville being as good as a member of the family? Surely the maharajah wasn't proposing to marry the lady. Beautiful enough. And English. But also old enough—she'd said so herself—to be his own mother. In the depth of Madame de Gerville's brown eyes—eyes so brown that they were almost black—he saw moist fire.

Deliberately she held to the matter of the morning. She'd drifted her eyes, not very swiftly, from Craig to Shri Bahadur.

"Sweet of you," she said, "to have sent Mr. Craig in the same howdah, to sit with me in the same machan."

Craig remembered that elephant ride vividly, but somehow all that he could remember about it was that Madame de Gerville had been beside him—perfect in her jodpuhrs, he would have sworn, not having seen her before in evening dress. He remembered that the shooting-platform—the machan—was in a cottontree with big, red flowers only because he'd handed her a blossom.

"Sweeter yet," Craig put in, "for Madame to have let me have the shot."

"If I'd taken it," she said, "I might have hit a beater."

"They're not all so considerate," the maharajah laughed. "My guests do pot a couple of my people every year."

The native music had tinkled off. An European orchestra panted into jazz.

"Dance, you two," said Shri Bahadur, "and enjoy yourselves."

He fluttered his hand and strolled away. Madame de Gerville moaned softly to herself: "No! No! No! Never!"

## CHAPTER TWO

### ROYAL COMMAND

**B**Y royal command," said Craig, and put an arm about the lady's slender waist. Her hand in his was as cool and soft as a flower. Still, he reflected, with proper self-discipline, he wasn't the only tiger-killer of the two. She'd told him herself that she was about fed up on bowling over creatures that didn't have a chance.

He recalled other things she'd told him. There were men who had their tigers killed with a trap-gun. The skin looked all the same when you got it home. There were others who caught their tigers or leopards in a sort of stone hut, using for bait a lamb that had had its ear twisted to make it bleat.

Craig wondered why he should be remembering these things now; and why, as he remembered them, he should always be thinking of Shri Bahadur as the sort of man who'd do such things.

He didn't like it. Shri Bahadur was an old friend. Shri Bahadur was his host.

And there was another twist to his thought as he and his partner came to the end of the room where the *gadi* was—the raised gold seat with its ring of defeated and supplicant tigers.

"You're dodging something because you're afraid," he was thinking.

It was true. He was poor. He was far from home. This was India, where he had certain work to do—work which depended almost solely on the favor of Shri Bahadur, Maharajah of Indarabad.

He lagged his step, then stopped, aware that this also was the immediate desire of Madame de Gerville.

"No, no, what?" he asked her softly.

She gave him a melancholy half-smile with eyes and lips. Attar of roses and the lights not in the least garish. At the moment she looked about sixteen. Damn it! Could any man find something better to do than to help a woman?

They found a secluded floral bower.

They were barely seated before a barefooted butler salaamed and presented a tray of brimming, bubbling glasses. *Nai!* The white shadow melted. Another was there. Salaam and cigarettes. *Achcha!* And Craig held the match. For seconds the smoke of their two cigarettes intermingled like—Craig could feel it—their intertwining sympathies.

"I've got a daughter," Madame Gerville announced at last, like a careful player putting down a card.

"How old?"

She made a mental calculation. "Seventeen."

"Nothing but a kid."

"I was no older when I was married—the first time. I was barely nineteen when Grail was born."

Craig did a mental sum. He was looking at Madame de Gerville's profile. He was strongly moved. Ten years older than himself—not much more. Say thirty-six. Ten years was not such an awful gap. Aloud he repeated that oddish name she'd mentioned, not that it was the center of his interest.

"Grail?"

She nodded. Her throat swelled. She tamped out her cigarette. "Let's get out of here," she suggested hastily.

Tents and tents. The central *shamiana* was surrounded by a colony of tents—spacious, multi-roomed, double-roofed and connected by tent corridors—where the maharajah housed his guests.

The corridors were dimly lighted. Everywhere there was a flitting of silent, ghostly servants. Attar of roses, oil of sandalwood, musk—the scents and shadows were like provocative whispers. Craig, for one, was glad when they reached the open air—even when the long drawn sigh of a breeze brought with it a tang of the ancient city beyond the palace gates.

The tang passed quickly enough. In Indarabad, out of doors, it was the jungle that set the mood of the night—that and the sky. Tonight the sky was clear. It might be a month yet before the rains began.

Madame de Gerville stopped and looked

about her in the blue dark. Craig took her hand and held it to his lips long enough for at least two breaths.

"That's what makes me hesitate," she said.

"What?"

"You're so fine."

"Good Lord! If you only knew!"

At that she laughed a little sadly. "I've been married twice. Why are we here? Why should I have been tempted to tell you my troubles when it can't possibly do either of us any good?"

But Craig could tell that she was shaking—not from the cold, because the night was warm. Just to steady her, Craig put his solid arms about her shoulders—lightly enough. He made no attempt to kiss her. She made no attempt to draw away or nestle closer. Her dark head was bowed beneath his face, sending up a faint fragrance that was neither musk nor sandalwood nor attar of roses. Her shaking steadied to a quiet. She appeared to meditate.

Craig was thinking. Ten years older. Mother of a girl—how old did she say—what was her name—Grail was?

Madame de Gerville raised her face, turned it a little to one side.

Craig read the prompting and meekly kissed her cheek.

"All right," she said. "I'll tell you. But it's just selfishness now. I'm not afraid any more of—at least one of the things I was before."

"What's that?" Craig asked.

"Nothing. You're a dear kid. You're all right. She'll be a lucky girl that ever marries you."

"Oh, I say!"

"Never mind. May I call you Brandon?" She caught the fingers of his nearer hand and before he could divine her intention, brushed them with her lips. "Come on, Brandon. Over here. I remember now. There's a marble bench by the lotus-tank, and we'll be away from those eavesdropping, those damnable tents."

Still with his fingers hooked in hers she led him far over to the bench. It was almost as if they were seated away off

somewhere in the jungle—shrubs and garden trees around them; frogs, crickets and running water covering over the sounds of music and voices from the tents.

Only once Craig turned to look in the direction of the tents. They gave him a momentary impression of snowy Kinchenjingha and her sister peaks as seen from Darjeeling on a moonlight night.

"I'm still married," said Madame de Gerville in a small and shuddery voice.

"Still married? I thought that Monsieur de Gerville—I beg your pardon."

She nodded. "He died. Fever. In Pondichéry. Eight years ago. He's buried there." There was a long silence. "It's pretty terrible," she said, as though discussing somebody else's business. "It's getting worse."

"What's getting worse?"

"It was in Pondichéry that Grail disappeared."

"How?"

"Stolen."

"Good God!"

"I—I've been looking for her ever since." She turned her delicate face and looked up at Craig. In the starlight it had become a fragile, tragic mask, haggard and mostly eyes, but beautiful. The mask spoke: "She's been found."

"Wonderful!"

She nodded. But the tragic stamp of her face merely deepened. Madame de Gerville was like someone fighting for life. She was collecting strength for another attack on some monster that was threatening to kill her. Truth! Truth can be an awful slugger.

"Grail's with her father. It was he who took her. When he'd found I'd married again." She was panting out these statements with pauses between. Each statement came like the blow delivered by a game but exhausted fighter. "You may remember his name." The name came in a sketchy whisper.

But Craig caught it: "Sir Hugh Wulverston!"

And like a sketchy whisper it began to form in his brain. It took on substance. Still in his brain it became a swelling

sound. There'd been a time when the name of Sir Hugh Wulverston had made a sound something like that round the whole world. Traffic with the enemy—in time of war. He was supposed to have committed suicide.

Craig held silent. What could he say? But he thought of something he could say to break this crushing silence.

"Where does Shri come in?" he asked.

Before Madame de Gerville could make any answer of her own, Shri Bahadur himself answered from the darkness:

"Here! Right now!"

## CHAPTER THREE

### LOVE AND HATE



HERE'D been no mistaking the sort of insolence with which his voice was charged. No "By your leave!" No "Beg your pardon!" Evidently he'd been hearing what was not intended for his ears. He was quite cynical about it. Craig's thought flamed—Kipling knew: East was East, and West was West.

Craig had come to his feet—somehow, for no particular reason, almost expecting a fight. A throwback in his thought over all of eighteen years. This was the selfsame tank in which the heir to ancient Indarabad had tried to drown him. Not far from here was where he'd hauled off and hit the heir to that golden *gadi* in there—tigerskins and all—on the nose. He felt like doing it again.

The maharajah came forward lightly through the blue dusk, shining white in his silk and gold. There were massed bushes like a black screen just back of him. The aromatic scent of them awoke another old memory in Craig's mind. The gardener had once told him the name of these bushes, *Hari shringar*.

He breathed the English equivalent aloud: "God's ornament!"

Unintentional—unpremeditated, at any rate; but the bitter sarcasm was there. Shri Bahadur hadn't missed it. For an instant, through the darkness, Craig felt the blaze of Shri Bahadur's eyes. It was as if a tiger had given him the stare.

"I am here, perhaps, for the good of us all," Shri Bahadur said, with only a faint trace of suppressed anger as he seated himself. His voice was smooth and swift—the glide of a snake, the figure occurred to Craig.

Craig also sat down, on the opposite side of Madame de Gerville. Deliberately he took her hand. She let him. They looked at Shri—two against one, no doubt about that.

"You two," said Shri, "were floundering into deep water. Pretty soon you might have been out of your depth. The least I could do was—what I'm doing now."

"What's that?" Craig challenged. But a swift pressure of Madame de Gerville's fingers warned him to ease up.

"Giving you fair warning," Shri answered sharply.

"That conveys a threat," said Craig.

"Please! Both you boys listen to me," Madame de Gerville broke in. "Shri, Brandon—Mr. Craig—doesn't even know yet what it's all about. Brandon, Shri proposes to marry my daughter, Grail."

"Oh, I see!"

"See what?" Shri Bahadur asked.

Put that way, it was a question that called for an answer—an answer thought out. There was a moment of silence.

"See," Craig said slowly, with his set jaw vibrating to his words, "what Madame de Gerville was leading up to."

"Guessing is sometimes dangerous," said Shri.

"I'll make one guess anyway," Craig retorted, "and you can make it as dangerous as you want to, Shri Bahadur. And be damned to you!"

"You forget—"

"I don't forget. Right now I'm remembering your father. He didn't threaten his guests."

"If you bring it on yourself—"

"I'm not talking about myself. I refer to Madame de Gerville. She's your guest. You're trying to coerce her to consent to this marriage by threats of some kind."

Madame de Gerville drew away her hand.

"All right," said Craig. "I suppose it's better that I leave."

"Don't go," said Madame de Gerville, and put a restraining hand on his arm.

"That's right, Agnes," said Shri Bahadur, dropping his elbows to his knees and staring at the ground. "Keep him here. He'd merely be getting himself killed—out in the jungle or somewhere."

"His Highness might let me hire one of his cars," said Craig.

"Rot!"

Madame de Gerville put out her hand and let it rest on Craig's knuckles. Craig's hand was straining at the edge of the bench on which the three of them sat. There was a tense silence.

"I'll make a statement," said Shri Bahadur. "Please don't interrupt me. I need not remind you who I am. I need not remind you where you are. Yet I do. Doing so, I prove that I'm not altogether unmindful of your safety. Call it a threat—say I've threatened you already, if you wish. Very well, it is a threat. You two might persuade yourselves that it would be madness for me to hurt either one of you. That is very true. But then, I might actually go mad. Now. Any time. There is madness in my family."

He was speaking softly, evenly, with his elbows still on his knees, still staring at the ground. But this was the first time that his threats had meant anything.

"I've a sort of cousin living up near Nepal," Shri Bahadur went on. He slowly straightened up, still seated but facing them. "His name is Manju Bahadur. Perhaps you have heard of him. One of the bold, tough hillmen who've at least kept Nepal out of the grip of the British Raj. Tried to fight a bear a couple of years ago, when he was going on sixty, with nothing but his *kukri*—you know, the Gurka knife. Did for it, too. But not until the bear got his nose and most of one cheek.

"I put it to you straight," he said. "It's to be him—or me!"

Craig felt the faint sharp quiver of Madame de Gerville's hand. He turned to her and asked softly: "Where is this daughter of yours?"

"I don't know."

"You know," said Craig, facing Shri Bahadur again.

"I do."

"Where?"

"I'll tell you where. You're interested in temples. The girl and her father are in a temple—a deserted temple—in the heart of the jungle."

"There are a hundred thousand deserted temples lost in the jungle."

"Yes."

"You said you'd tell me where."

"If I told you more, America would lose one of its brightest young archaeologists."

"Come to yourself, Shri. Please do! You're not yourself. Shri, you are the Maharajah of Indarabad."

"With power of life and death, and tell that to your friend, the Resident, when you see him next."

"You don't even know what the girl looks like."

"Oh, don't I though!"

"You've seen her?"

"Less than a month ago."

"And her father?"

"Ask Agnes."

"He brought me a bracelet I gave Sir Hugh years ago," said Madame de Gerville.

"With a spoken message, Agnes," Shri Bahadur prompted. "You are reticent. You're confusing your new friend."

Madame de Gerville flamed: "But he would have written—"

It was a cry. She was unable to go on. Openly, with no sense of inhibition, Craig put his arms about her gently and pulled her to him. He sat there for a while trying to get a grip on himself. He'd crack—he was sure of it—if he didn't watch out. Against his breast he could feel the sharp, spasmodic movement of Madame de Gerville's head and shoulders as she tried to control her sobs.

Across her through the blue and scented gloom Craig looked at Shri. The maharajah returned his look—dim, unguessable, poisonous and rich: India itself.

"What was the message Sir Hugh sent?" Craig asked.

"To that I might answer by saying that it's none of your damned business."

"You might. But I shouldn't, if I were you."

"Why not?"

"Because—"

In the straining dark and silence each could feel the other thinking thoughts of murder—a sort of silent thunder. Shri Bahadur broke the silence gingerly.

"Sir Hugh wants Madame de Gerville to come for the girl herself."

"Where does this bear-fighting cousin of yours come in?"

The silence that followed was even more pregnant now than it was before. The silence lasted long. A slow tumult in the mind of Craig took shape and reason. He knew the answer to that question he had asked. The cousin Shri had mentioned, disfigured, old and awful, was to be offered Madame de Gerville as a sort of ransom.

Even as this grotesque horror of a thought-cloud shaped itself, Craig saw confirmation in Shri Bahadur's face.

It happened in an instant. Craig twisted free. He'd flung himself forward and caught the maharajah by the throat.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DARK LABYRINTH



AT that, Craig had been barely quick enough. There'd always been that swift reading of intent and secret thought between them. The heir of Indarabad, at the moment Craig was fumbling near the truth, had slipped a hand to the sash that was part of his costume. Craig saw the move and knew the purpose of it almost before it was begun.

As he caught Shri's throat, Shri brought a small jeweled dagger into play. He struck Craig twice in the left side. Before he could strike again, Craig released a hand and brought it up in a jolt that toppled the Hindu backward.

Craig went with him, murder in his heart.

Shri had dropped his dagger. The fall of it on the marble bench was almost as

loud as any single incident of the fight thus far. He'd been no outcry.

The two of them, American and Hindu, lay across the bench heads down. In the blue dusk of the night, the marble bench was a pallor. On it there was a spreading stain.

All this had happened with such speed, with such an astounding outburst of violence without sound, that Madame de Gerville was as if stunned at first, trying to work reality out of chimera, substance out of nightmare. She'd been flung aside. It was as if she'd been snatched from a dream—or plunged into one.

But she saw the stain on the marble. She'd been to the pitiful school of tragedy so long that fresh tragedy now merely steadied her.

She was around the bench—imploring, working with her hands; but it was all in whispers, all without sound.

At a cry of alarm, there'd be general tumult.

To several million Hindus, many of them near, the Maharajah of Indarabad wasn't a man; he was an avatar; he was the incarnation of a god.

Madame de Gerville righted the two of them, to some extent—pushed them up to the bench. She'd got Craig to loosen his grip. None too soon. A little more and Indarabad would have been without a ruler. The maharajah lay on his back, eyes staring, mouth open. He wasn't breathing. There was a click in his throat to make one think of the death-rattle—so often mentioned, so seldom heard.

Craig, staggering a little, went to the tank—there where Shri had tried to drown him as a boy—and scooped up water in his hands. Not much was left by the time he was back, but his hands were gentle as he brushed Shri Bahadur's face.

Another click and Shri came out of it. Now his lungs became a bellows. It looked at first as if each breath was meant to come back out as a shriek.

Craig brought his face close to the maharajah's. "Keep quiet now," he repeated in a whisper. "Don't yell. If you do, I'll kill you, Shri."

Suddenly Shri spoke. "I hear you."

Madame de Gerville whispered: "Brandon, you're bleeding. You've been stabbed."

Craig, still watchful over Shri Bahadur, tested his wounded side in various ways. "Nothing serious," he pronounced, although now that the excitement was over each breath meant a shock of pain. "If he'd stuck me deep enough, he'd have reached a lung." He took thought. "We'll have to be moving," he said. "We're in a mess."

"My tent," Madame de Gerville suggested.

"Good," Craig told her. "Go see if the coast is clear."

Before she could leave, Shri Badahur stopped her with a gesture and a muffled word.

"Not those silly tents," he labored. "You might as well post us up in the market place."

"Where then?"

"The palace."

Madame de Gerville, concerned for both of them, started to protest. "But Shri, they'll see—"

"In the palace," said Shri, staring and spacing his phrases, "they that see—what they're not supposed to see—go blind."

The three of them walked away like pleasure seekers in a park—a man and a woman in evening dress and one in carnival. Revelers. A little tired. A little tipsy.

There was a guest palace at Indarabad. But it was little used. It lay off to the left, dimly seen on the crown of a little hill, dark and sad like a haunted house. And haunted—Shri Badahur said so—sure enough, by snakes and scorpions, and bats and other things. To such a point that not even the thief and murder castes of Indarabad would use it any more, as a hideout, for their secret meetings.

The maharajah appeared to be talking mostly to himself, yet willing to be heard—the bitter musings of a disillusioned cynic.

His musings would have been funny if they hadn't been so awful. A maha-

rajah in gala, himself now with a taste of thuggery in his bruised throat.

Secret meetings. Dark cults. Orgies with more than a hint of cannibalism about them.

The way to the palace seemed long—a plaza laid out to the scale of elephants, an expanse of steps reminiscent of Versailles. Back from the terrace above the stairs the palace itself reared its huge bulk.

Craig remembered the building well. His earliest impression—the one stamped into his memory when he first came here as a child with the general, his grandfather—returned to him now. Combination of circus and fort, of prison and county fair. Then—something else. Inside the place, the heir of Indarabad became his guide, had led him through what seemed like a thousand tunnels—dark, sharply angled, mysterious. For his child-mind, bred to the sun and the open air, that dark labyrinth had become a place of growing terror.

A breath of the old nightmare returned to him now.

Madame de Gerville was on his right. Shri Bahadur was on his left. Under the arm of each, Craig had slipped an arm. In his right hand he held the dagger Shri had dropped.

Craig held back and the three of them stopped in a huddle.

"You'd better go back to the tents," Craig told Madame de Gerville.

"I don't want to leave you," she said.

Shri Bahadur broke in: "Then come along. It won't take long. I've plenty of first-aid kit. You can patch him up yourself."

"I think that would be better," Madame de Gerville said.

Craig was thinking. A plan was forming in his mind. In any case they'd need the first-aid kit. It was in a dispensary he'd established—Shri Bahadur told them—in a basement of the palace.

"And you may do as you damn well please, so far as I'm concerned," Shri Bahadur added. "I'm going to bed."

"I think not," Craig told him. "You'll stay with us—right on through."

"Through what?"

"This business you've started."

As Shri Bahadur glared, Craig lifted the dagger into his line of vision.

They entered the palace by a small door set in the side of a vestibule built out from the side of the building in heavy masonry. Inside the vestibule, set high on a little shelf was a kitchen lamp that looked neglected and burned with a feeble flame.

In the depth of the vestibule, under the shadow of the lamp, two soldiers in dark uniforms and white turbans stood at attention with bayoneted rifles in their hands.

Shri Bahadur spoke softly—at Craig rather than to him. "If I but spoke the word, you may not know it, but you wouldn't have a chance."

"You'd die first," said Craig.

They turned sharply to the left up three steep and grimy steps. Another narrow door, another smoky lamp. Prostrate on the floor an old man lay.

"Huzur," he announced, "a visitor awaits."

Shri Bahadur gave a meditative start.

"Let him wait," said Craig, and he picked up the lamp. "Now, if you please, lead the way."

Trailing shadows and mining an all-besetting dark, they made their way through room after room, hallway after hallway, none of them large. Fortress, this was. In case of attack there'd be fighting from room to room. Not all imagination. Death, potentially in every shadow. Had the maharajah already sounded some secret alarm? There was no way of telling.

They were in the dispensary at last—Shri Bahadur, sullen in a corner; Craig stripped to the waist and arms up, but his right hand still holding the dagger and his eyes on Shri, while Madame de Gerville tamponed his wounds—nothing, after all, but scratches.

The door clicked. The three of them jerked and stared. It was to see an apparition of horror—a face only remotely human; a human face, but one that had been terribly disfigured!



## CHAPTER FIVE

## JUNGLE NIGHT

**I**T was the Maharajah of Indarabad who broke the silence first. He spoke in a frightened whisper—with breath enough but somehow voiceless.

"*Jaol! Jaol!*"

It meant: "Get out! Get out!"

A blur of understanding came to focus in Craig's mind. The apparition was staring at Shri Bahadur. It let out a sort of wicked laugh and also whispered, but loudly—a wind in a cavern:

"*Peyechi!*"

Meaning, "I have found thee!"

Ratification of what Craig thought—or hoped. There was no love lost between these two.

"Nay," said Craig—and his knowledge of several vernaculars, though limited, was good. "Come in! Come in! And—*kosha moodi*—welcome with blessings!"

The visitant turned his one good eye on Craig, and it was hard to tell whether he was laughing silently or was raging. The eye slid over Craig's bare torso, found interest in the wounds—showing a flash of keen intelligence; then came to Madame de Gerville.

So far, Madame de Gerville had barely moved—"frozen" like a bird dog, and now ready to break. But game. She perhaps felt more courageous with Craig at her back and she repeated like a soft echo Craig's last two words:

"*Kosha moodi!*"

The man came in—powerful, agile, attractive when you could forget his face, dressed mostly in khaki and linen. No turban; instead, a little round cap on his grizzled head.

Shri Bahadur had broken out into a vehement, swift flow of words that Craig couldn't understand—except here and there an oath; but the newcomer stopped him with a most vigorous gesture and continued his study of Madame de Gerville. Since his first glance at her he hadn't looked away.

"Sit down and rest yourself," said Craig.

Madame de Gerville sighed as one does when a dentist stops work and says, "That will be all just now." The man had looked away. He glanced at Craig, then at Shri, then back at Craig again.

"Who's master here?" he asked.

"I am, O Manju, Killer of Bears," Craig answered.

Manju Bahadur seated himself on his heels. He had a good, clean rifle in his hands and a cartridge bandoleer across his breast. At his belt hung a strong-bladed knife—the same *kukri* no doubt with which he'd killed the bear that had disfigured him. He watched absorbed as Madame de Gerville now ran bands of gauze about Craig's body to complete her dressing of the wounds.

Craig thanked her. He handed her the dagger. He spoke to her in careful Bengali so that Manju would understand.

"Watch Shri Bahadur while I dress."

Manju grunted a sound like a laugh. "You say well," he said, "for even a maharajah may prove faithless."

Craig pushed into his shirt. "You speak as one having experience."

"Shri Bahadur enriched me at least in that respect," the visitor replied.

"How so?"

"Lo! He promised me this woman. I find her here dressing the wounds of another."

Shri Bahadur broke in fiercely, half-rising from his chair. But the hillman snorted him to silence.

"How so?" Craig asked. "How could Shri Bahadur have promised you this lady? You talk like a fool."

Manju looked about him. He may have been going over in his mind something Shri himself had just said. He fixed Craig with his eye. "Is she thine?" he asked.

Craig took the dagger from Madame de Gerville. She was shrinking a little, but merely as a fighting animal might shrink.

"Watch the lamp," Craig told her in English. "We don't want to be left in the dark. Watch Shri." He spoke to Shri, still using English. "Shri, if war breaks out, I'll try to kill you first."



Shri pleaded softly, "Unless we trap that brute, he'll kill us both and take her anyhow."

Craig didn't answer. He looked at Manju. The hillman's squat had become indefinitely the crouch. If it came to a battle, the rifle would probably be dropped. Even Ghurkas trained for years in the British army prefer the knife.

Craig said to Manju: "You saw the memsahib dress my wounds."

"Yes."

"Then you and I have no quarrel."

"No."

Craig turned his back and continued his dressing—studs, tie, coat. He listened acutely. Shri and Manju were speaking again, a jerky, throaty murmur that he couldn't understand. Shri Bahadur was expostulating—that was clear enough; pleading, arguing. His cousin from the hills uttered no more than an occasional murmur.

Craig whispered to Madame de Gerville. "Now's your chance. Slip out quickly. I'll hold them here."

"If you die, I die," she told him in a breath.

"It's to save your daughter—get away—tell the Resident—"

The only answer from Madame de Gerville was a sudden cry of warning. Craig pivoted. It was to see Shri Bahadur on his feet with a large bottle of carbolic acid in his hands. The cork was out. He tossed away a little of the liquid. The smell of it filled the room.

"I'll burn you alive if either of you move," the maharajah said. He was speaking to Craig and Madame de Gerville—speaking in English. "I'll give you faces worse than his!" and he indicated his cousin.

He started to walk slowly from his corner, so tense and full of sinister meaning that there was a sort of incandescence about him.

He was headed for the door. He was keeping his eyes on Craig.

Craig had shoved Madame de Gerville back of him. He was restraining her there. In his other hand he held the dagger, poised but useless. He knew that

bottle Shri held. He and Madame de Gerville had rejected the acid in it just now as too strong, too dangerous. It was liquid fire.

"Move, damn you!" Shri mocked in a whining whisper. He was too constrained for normal tones of speech. "Who's master—"

There was a grunt and a lurch just back of him. Manju, the hillman, had thrust out and gripped an ankle.

The maharajah let out a screech and jerked the bottle to a tilt. He fell over a little way. And Craig, who'd jumped at him, striking at him with his dagger—Shri's own dagger—with intent to kill, felt nothing on the steel but a rip of silk and tinsel. His impetus was such that Craig crashed on—stumbling against the wall.

At that, Shri was free and through the door.

He'd burned and stamped away the hand that had seized him, Manju's.

Manju had started to his feet. But strange fire was eating an arm, eating one of his legs. He could fight a mad bear in the jungle with nothing but a knife. He couldn't fight this Shaitan's magic. Manju was suffering so that for the time he was helpless. A child could have taken his gun and knife.

Straining, straining, like a horse dragging an overload up a hill—a hill of fire for Manju. Then swiftly but gradually, the pain grew less and Manju found that both the woman and the man were anointing him with oil.

They'd heard a distant screech. There was no mistaking it. That was Shri Bahadur's voice. The voice of a devil gone raving with rage and triumph.

They heard the shriek again—diminishing.

It was followed almost immediately by a distant clamor of many elements—shots, drums, the hoot of trumpets.

"Shiva-Vishnu!" said Manju. "And now he'll be cheating me even out of the maiden."

"What maiden?"

"The one who looks like her," he replied, indicating Madame de Gerville.

"You two—even the woman—Shri Bahadur will kill. He told me so just now—and the girl—"

"Know you the way out of here?" Craig asked.

"Yes."

"Can you find it in the dark?"

"Follow!" said Manju. "In the dark, I have the eye of a tiger." He was listening to the signals of alarm. At the same time wonder touched him as he watched Madame de Gerville pour yet another bottle of oil over his bandaged leg, then over the bandaged arm.

She'd served five years in hospitals during and after the war.

"And in the dark," said Manju looking at Craig but speaking belike at the woman, "I have a face like yours."

Two hours later, by ways and cunning they'd never forget—nor understand—Manju had brought them through an entire army and a racing torchlit riot. Tonight they'd heard the voice of a lynching mob. Now the jungle reared its black cruelty about them—and they feared it less.

## CHAPTER SIX

### TIGER—TIGER!

**E**VEN while all this was happening—riot included, with thirteen killed and two hundred other indiscriminate victims, more or less, infecting fresh wounds with unclean rags and filthy lotions—the music and dancing had continued in the *shamiana*. The butlers went their rounds, barefoot and turbaned—a score of them at least. Salaam and pass! Salaam again!

The wine was chilled and lively, *Toujours juste à point!* My word, what do they do with all the stuff that begins to lose its sparkle?

The maharajah's elephants like it.

More nautch. Twelve girls this time. Bayadeers, temple dancers. They must be neophytes, they look so young. But they dance like full initiates. Clever that! The other lights are dimmed. The music goes into a muted, thudding murmur and the girls are a dream of Krishna's milk-

maids as they dance under an artificial moon.

Might as well make a night of it anyway. No more tigers. One of his highness's aides passes the word around. Advice has just arrived that another of the maharajah's cousins is—likely to die.

Getting too deucedly hot anyway. But what's all this talk about a ruction in the streets of Indarabad tonight?

The servants talked. Madame de Gerville had a maid, Kasturi. She'd had her for years. Craig had a factotum, Dost Mohammed, who was a gray heirloom from the general, and after the general, Craig's mother. Dost Mohammed would be about as careless of Craig's disappearance as he would of his own head.

Then there was a young Englishman among the maharajah's guests who would some day be a noble lord.

And it merely happened, of course, that the young Englishman's chief native servant—the young Englishman had three—was a most efficient but self-oblitative fellow who answered to the name of Hakim. Which wasn't as a matter of fact, his name at all.

The truth of the matter was that in certain circles this man Hakim was better known by a number. The name might change. The number didn't. Hakim was a most valued member of the C. I. D.—the Criminal Investigation Department.

Touche business, fooling with the diversifications of these native rulers. Especially in times like these.

And down from the hills had come various rumors about a certain Manju Bahadur and his cousin, the Maharajah of Indarabad.

Past midnight and Hakim had seen his young Englishman put to bed. There'd been other things than champagne and the boy had sought to drown his grief. He'd been smitten—terribly so, the first noble passion of his life—by a certain Madame de Gerville. And quite obviously she'd passed him completely up for an American. He'd probably wind up by shooting Brandon Craig—if the happy ever showed up again. Craig and the charming widow had disappeared.

Hakim knew—almost before anyone else. He talked, he listened—to Kasturi, Madame de Gerville's maid; to Dost Mohammed, Craig's man—and neither of these servants were in the slightest degree of the talkative kind; to many others Hakim talked and listened. And sometime between midnight and dawn, at Hakim's bidding, one of the obscurer subjects of the Maharajah of Indarabad set out to run the sixteen miles of jungle-road that led to the nearest railway telegraph.

There was a local telegraph office also, to be sure; and Hakim used it. But telegrams filed in the stations of some of these native states had a way of arriving one week late or with curious amendments.

Hakim's runner was practically naked. At no place along his black sixteen miles of jungle road was he safe from snake or leopard, tiger or bear; or *bhuts*, which are ghosts. But he carried a string of *rudraksha* beads, supposed to help. He didn't know. He didn't care. He had a silver rupee tied in his loincloth. Stepping high and wide, he kept dropping the miles behind him. . . .

What interested Secret Agent Hakim as much as anything in all this was that the maharajah himself had disappeared.

"There's the long way and the short way," Manju had said; "the horse way and the tiger way. Shri Bahadur—I know him—will take the way of rajahs and women. We'll go the trail of tigers and men."

There was a real trail, Craig learned, back into the hills that carried the name of the Tiger Trail. Tigers had their individual rounds. That he knew. A regular schedule, with a great time sense—the striped pointer of a fearful clock, ticking off death toward the allotted hour—a month and half or two months to complete the round of some jungle dial. Then also, these great annual migrations Manju spoke about—like buffalo, like people.

Tigers snarled at rain. They didn't like it. When the rains began in the lowlands the ablest of the tiger horde—even as

did the great ones of the British Raj—took to the hills.

Two days up from Indarabad, where Manju could be sure of the people about him, he'd stopped to rest. Yet Manju—"In the dark I have a face like yours"—had seen to the comfort, as well as he could, of his *sahib-log*—Sahib Craig and the memsahib who had oiled his burns.

At the break of the first day, two hillmen—Paharias, dwellers in the hills—had gone down into Indaraba Town.

They returned with certain luggage and ponies and two servants to be vouched for by the *sahib-log*—the white folks. Dost Mohammed was one of these, and for him Craig vouched—as he would have vouched for father and mother. The other was one Hakim, to take the place of Kasturi, Madame de Gerville's maid, and for him Dost Mohammed vouched, which made him acceptable. Kasturi had been reassured. She would take all else that belonged to her lady to Darjeeling, where Madame de Gerville had a house.

Beyond this next jungle village there would be no more horse-travel. Then would begin the true Tiger Trail.

The Hindus have a proverb: Let him who has never seen a tiger look at a cat.

As the trail of the cat crosses back fences, the Tiger Trail went up and down over these spurs and gothic butresses of the Himalaya foothills. Not even a palanquin now would do to help the sick, the feeble, or the lazy, along this way of men and tigers. A *dandi* perhaps—a chair or even a basket on a coolie's back.

But such was not for Craig, not any of them—not even the woman or Manju, whose burned leg went out of service.

Manju rested at a temporary camp that the dwellers of the hills were building for him one afternoon, when a breathless boy came running into the clearing and announced: "Huzur"—as one might say, "O Presence"—"the tiger has appeared."

The hand of the tiger-clock had made its round. The small village from which this boy came was one of the figures

on the tiger-clock dial. The clock had struck. The tiger had killed this boy's brother.

"I'll go," said Craig.

It was Hakim—Madame de Gerville's new servant—who suggested that Craig take a shotgun—twenty-bore and loaded with lethal bullets; a better weapon in the dark than any rifle. The shooting would be in the dark.

Curious about Hakim. He seemed to know about everything. Yet serving now in lieu of a lady's maid.

Yet there was one thing that Hakim hadn't known nor guessed. Nor Craig himself. Nor the almost omniscient Dost Mohammed. Had Manju? There came, again and again to Craig, as he followed his guide, the last look he'd had of Manju—and Madame de Gerville.

She'd insisted still on being the trained nurse to this hillman whose face had been raked by a bear. Hot water, disinfectant, oil, cotton and gauze—alien flesh burned raw and an alien soul flaming down at her from an eye that was like a star of dangerous omen.

Manju Bahadur had risked his life in a variety of unholy ways when he'd called on his cousin, the Maharajah of Indarabad. In a way, it appeared, Manju himself was a claimant to the Indarabad throne.

Craig caught a mental vision of Manju, back there in his temporary camp, dreaming of taking that throne for himself some day, and having this memsahib as the mother of his heir. "In the dark, I have a face like yours. . . ." He'd also said: "None but a maharajah could be comely with a face like mine."

Without a pause, the boy had turned from the camp to return to the village of the tiger. That was at four in the afternoon. Night fell. Up—they crossed a razorback divide—down—they threaded a thin, hard trail through high grass.

They walked all night. It was just before daybreak that they came to a collection of mountain-huts where everyone was astir and where a hundred voices were murmuring that fateful word—in reproach, it seemed, rather than anger:

*"Bagh! Bagh!"*

Craig knew they were crying "Tiger! Tiger!"

And a hundred were ready to escort the sahib out to where the Lord of Death had spread his table. They'd not disturbed what was left of the tiger's victim.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### GRAIL



THESE people were goatherds and dealers in jungle produce. They'd fed their lord the tiger without complaint as long as he selected meat from among their goats. This village was his village. Every fourth moon he'd come to collect his tax. But the time before this he'd killed a woman, this time a boy.

They'd left the boy where the tiger had put him, which was not very far from the place where he'd made the kill. This was where he would appear again.

In a light so gray that it was nearly dark, they led—yet followed—Craig out through the village and up through a thick tangle of rose bushes to a little plateau. There was a hush as they came to the plateau—an old goat pasture, gnawed to the rock except for an occasional patch of thorn.

The boy who had been Craig's guide was shivering at his side—not from fear, Craig divined; more like an eager hound in leash. The boy raised a thin, naked arm and pointed. Craig followed the point.

The thing was there.

He could feel that it was there. Yet he couldn't see it. He could feel the vibration of the villagers fanned out in a wide arc back of him. They also saw it. They were shivering like this boy.

Then Craig saw it. He had been seeing it all along. Only he hadn't been aware that he'd been seeing it.

A disc like a moon. A moon came to earth to slake some awful lunar appetite. Yet wholly aloof from earthly emotion. One of the largest tiger masks he had ever seen—motionless, implacable.

Yes, this much the tiger would concede. The man herd pleased him better than the herd of goats. . . .

With no sense of time, yet master of time, Craig raised his gun. He was so tired that he had no shake left in him. So many times had he risked death this night in that endless plod and scramble through jungle depths and over high rocks that fear had been drained out of him completely.

He was in no hurry. He saw the lash of a tail. He had to lower his forward sight a bit as the moon-disc lowered and changed expression. The tiger was going to charge. These people back of him were frightened. He could feel that they were.

He fired.

Where the moon had been there was a great eruption. It was as if a horse had reared—but a tiger, its forepaws spread into a clawed and shaggy cross against the mournful dawn.

Dead. He knew it.

But he kept the villagers back until he'd gone forward to make sure, his second barrel ready. He stood there looking down at the striped thing. He'd shot it between the eyes. It was the place he'd aimed at. He felt no pride.

As he turned and started back, the people were already rushing forward, clamoring and wailing and expressing wonder. He shut his eyes and ears against the sight. He wanted to rest. He wanted peace and food. He felt such a poignant melancholy that he had the greatest desire in the world to sit down somewhere and weep.

Mingled with this melancholy somehow, was a loneliness for Madame de Gerville. He was like that tiger he'd just killed back there. The natives had told him that the reason the tiger hadn't returned to its kill earlier was that it had been off visiting—fighting, probably, courting. He wished that he and Madame de Gerville were tigers—

He raised his eyes. He stopped transfixed.

Heart and brain had stopped, it seemed, for now there was a sense of their hum-

ming and throbbing again where before there'd been nothing but a numbness.

A voice inside his brain kept shouting the news that had shocked him so and now was thrilling him. Yet even so, he couldn't realize it. The truth was too astounding.

A younger, a more haunting Madame de Gerville was standing there in front of him—hair, eyes, mouth, even that subtle hint of telling you things without the need of words. This was Madame de Gerville's daughter. This was Grail.

"Good morning," said Craig.

"How strange!" she said.

They stood there looking at each other. Even in those few seconds there was an infusion of pink warmth in the gray dawn. It was as if the dead world were being called back to life.

"That's so," said Craig. "It's strange all right."

He had no particular idea as to just what he meant, but he felt that it was so. He hadn't smiled. Grail smiled—fleetingly, with a little toss of her head, as if she were throwing the smile over her shoulder.

"You're Grail," he said. "I know your mother."

"You come from her?"

He meditated briefly. Well, he did come from Madame de Gerville, didn't he? He answered: "Yes."

Boots and breeches, he noticed—greatly scuffed and even graceful through long use; a rough, silk shirt, with something vaguely Tibetan about it; an old tweed coat that originally had been meant for a man—or a boy. The collar of the coat turned up a little in the back. A boy in stature and build. Yet the most feminine creature he'd ever seen—in the old romantic, stirring, die-for-you sense, when women were ladies and men were knights.

Her head was bare and her dark hair, wavy and abundant, had tawny weatherings that somehow matched her skin.

"How is mother?" she asked.

"Fine. She's on her way to see you."

"And—see father?"

Craig nodded, not so sure. He asked: "How is your father?"

She paused. He waited. She said: "Fine!" Not so very sure. She jumped for a certainty and announced it. "We're not very long back from Tibet," she said. "That's great! Tibet!"

His enthusiasm evidently caused her a little quiet surprise. "If I may ask," she said, "I'd love to know who you are."

"Oh, I'm sorry. My name is Brandon Craig."

"Brandon Craig!" she mused, and for no particular reason, tossed another smile over her shoulder. "I know there was a General Craig. Of the British army?"

Craig shook his head. She'd seen his slight start at her mention of a general. He'd thought she was going to mention General Brandon. Was she going to think now that he was concealing something? There was some sort of a submerged shadow now in her crystal mood.

"Father never sent those arms into Tibet," she said. "Books were what he sent. You know how heavy books are. And he had to be secret about it because they were meant for the Tashai Lama. You know how jealous of him the Dalai Lama was."

Craig nodded. The warm, bright eyes of the girl were demanding some sort of acknowledgment. She went on.

"Well, the books were dumped, just as father always knew they must have been, and the machine-guns put in their place—"

Craig was listening. But it was rather as one very often listens to music. His senses were lulled by a flow of liquid rapture. His mind set free. What a peach of a girl! This was spring. Yes, and a perfume, a hue of miracle about all this. He'd thought he was in love with Madame de Gerville. Yes, he did love her. He could confess it now. For here was Madame de Gerville herself begun all over again. The most impossible of all dreams realized. The "might have been" became "it is."

"Don't you think so?" Grail asked on a note of tender exaltation.

"Absolutely!" And he wished he'd followed what she'd said.

The wish redoubled under her gentle,

serious scrutiny. Presently she told him that she'd "come over" to buy the daily supply of goat's milk. Two miles, just about—equal to six down on the *tarai*, the plains below; up here—jungle, rocky, up and down.

"Alone?"

She nodded.

"You must have started in dark night."

"I wanted to see you."

"Me?"

The faintest stain of added color contributed its mite to her smile.

"Well, I heard that someone was coming to kill their tiger. You see, we've a tiger of our own. I rather hoped that this one might be ours. But it isn't. Ours is smaller, a deeper orange. I've seen it twice—"

"Good Lord!"

And she was walking these woods alone.


"Father's set a trap for it. He's made that much of a concession. You see, he's a Bhuddist. He doesn't believe in killing—not even to save his life."

"Nor yours?"

She shook her head with a wistful look.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### JUNGLE EDEN

 HE Honorable Grail Wulverston, the facts somehow became translucent; daughter of Lord Wulverston of Wulverston. She didn't blame her father for carrying her off. General Craig, who'd headed the war-time court, had begun by driving her father practically insane. Her father, she surmised, must have been just a little mad anyway. A Bhuddist. A vegetarian. "You understand?"

"How'd he ever happen to get married?" Craig quavered. He hastily added: "Of course, I'm terribly glad he did."

"My mother was beautiful. Father loved beautiful things."

As for the rest, the beautiful world of the Wulverstons blown up, annihilated, when Lord Wulverston was "caught red-handed" shipping arms into Tibet. *C'était*

*la guerre!* And everybody—positively everyone—suffering from some sort of shellshock!

Grail bought goat's milk. So did Craig. On goat's milk they breakfasted together in a jungle sunrise, under a spreading cedar.

"How long does your father expect to remain in this old temple?" Craig asked.

Grail's eyes went moist. But she laughed. "He's waiting for transport. The Maharajah of Indarabad has promised him a hundred ponies and men. It will take that many to get out the books that were dumped there when the arms were substituted. We found out about all that while we were in Tibet."

Craig asked softly: "How did the Maharajah of Indarabad become interested?"

She looked away.

"Tell me," he commanded.

First, she said, they'd been looked over and questioned by a queer and grotesque sort of person who appeared to be the suzerain of all the hills people hereabouts. His people called him the Baloo—the Bear. He'd fought a terrific battle with a bear—

Craig recognized the sketch. Manju.

He said nothing. He didn't want to interrupt her. Any more than one would have wanted to interrupt the song of a thrush.

But this wasn't all thrush music. Baloo had offered to buy her. He'd offered her father lands and money. He'd offered a thousand books, none of which would be less than a thousand years old. Just as a sample, he'd brought Sir Hugh a few samples—pages of beaten gold, painted in vivid colors—

Craig's breast rose and fell. There was the soul of a Lorenzo the Magnificent in that old bandit. Manju Baloo! "In the dark I have a face like yours." Craig felt vaguely ennobled and at the same time a great distress. He could have killed Manju. Yet if he'd been Manju, he'd have done the same. He was Manju now, in his heart, as he looked at the girl. Having looked at her, how would he ever live without her?

But when Sir Hugh had turned the old Bear out, Manju had applied himself to the girl direct. With stories. With gifts. With threats—against himself, her father, the three of them together.

"And all this time," said Grail, "he had us absolutely in his power."

"What held him back?"

"He wasn't altogether bad. Like a bear. He was like a cave bear. Ravening. But tameable—almost. And I couldn't get father to leave his precious books."

"How'd you get here?"

"With a party of Tibetan priests—at the risk of their lives."

"You might, perhaps, have sent a message. To the nearest thanadar—the chiefs of police are loyal."

"There was no one to send. These were all his people. Finally I got him to go himself—down to Indaraba. The maharajah came."

Not until now did Grail show a flame of anger.

"Never mind," said Craig.

He'd walked all night. He hadn't slept. He needed a bath. He yearned for a slave. The thought wouldn't leave him that he felt and looked like Manju Baloo.

He wrote a note to Manju Baloo on a palm-sheath with the point of his knife. It was really to Madame de Gerville. Manju would give it to her to translate:

We wait here. All well. B. C.

He gave the note to a young hillman and bade him take it to Baloo.

And the boy was off at a trot as if he were headed for the corner grocery.

*Chains.* Collectors of jungle stuff—gums and fruit, snakes and monkeys and birds. Wild as the jungle itself. There wasn't one but carried a strong knife.

He called for the elders of the caste. Five of them, and two could understand his Bengali.

Baloo, he told them, had nearly been slain by his cousin, the maharajah. The maharajah was now headed up into the hills by the horse trail to take Baloo in a net. Was there not a way to delay the coming of the maharajah until Baloo



himself could come and advise them what to do?

*Huzur!*

There was to be a Tiger Feast this night. There was nothing that so gave strength to the already strong. Was there ever a time when Chains could not block a jungle trail? Let the sahib friend of Balooji sleep on both ears. The thing was done.

Yet the sun still almost on a level—slanting a thousand golden bars through the trees wherever the woods were a little open. A morning like that of a perfect June day at home—hardwood, evergreen, drifts of bloom like dogwood and wild cherry; a white girl to walk beside.

"I was afraid," said Grail, "that you wouldn't be what you are. Now I'm afraid because you are what you are."

One of the goatherds had gone on before them with the jar of milk. Grail was walking lightly at his side where a grove of deodars made the going easy. It was as if there were no enemy in the world.

"Say that again," he said.

She did. He repeated it after her. Without aforethought, it seemed, they'd stopped and were looking at each other. He was down the slope of the hill, so that now she was looking down at him. A curious thing about a look—some looks; and this was one of them. It had begun as nothing. Its transformation into something splendid and unearthly was as swift and soft as that of a falling star.

"Yes," he said.

She was touched by an agitation.

"Yes, what?"

"I know I look like an awful tramp," he said.

She shook her head. There could be no doubt about it. She distrusted words just then.

"But, Grail, I tell you reverently, you're the most marvelous thing God ever made."

"I—I like you, too," she said.

"Do you think it would worry your father if we sat down here for say, five minutes?"

She sat down at once with her arms

about her knees and looked away. Still without looking at him, she said in a little voice, "Try to sleep for a moment. You must be nearly dead."

"I'm nearly dead," said Craig.

He put down the gun. He stretched himself out on the cushioned, fragrant carpet under the deodars. He closed his eyes, seriously bent on a moment of oblivion. But almost instantly, his eyes came open, meeting hers. She smiled. He noticed the small, white teeth between her sensitive, lovely lips.

Again she looked away. "Sleep!" she lulled.

But he was now invaded by a sudden violence of emotion that brought him up with a jerk to sit at her side—frightening, a little bit, like an unexplained swirl suddenly developed in a quiet pool: an unseen monster, something terrible, ungessed and beyond control.

"But Grail," he cried, "I can't sleep. Oh—"

"You're overwrought," she said. "I suppose it's because—well, just that tiger was enough."

"Not that, Grail. No, not that. I know. Would you mind—it would help a lot, Grail—if I told you really what it is?" He was watching her. She was gazing at her knees, smiling faintly, with a mystic look. "I promise," he assured her hoarsely, "it won't hurt you."

"All right," she said, suspended and motionless. "What?"

"Oh, God, I love you so!"

She drew a long, soft breath. "No, that didn't hurt," she said. "But I feel as if my heart were breaking."

He leaned over and touched his lips to her sunburnt hair.

## CHAPTER NINE

### ALIAS, HAKIM



VARIOUS, the things the sun could see if the sun were an eye.

Take Hakim, for example, valet to Madame de Gerville.

"*Chota hasri, Memsahibi!*"

Little breakfast, early tea; turbaned, barefooted—as a sign of polite respect;



freshly immaculate in white, impersonal as a sphinx.

Hakim had the cheek-line of a good bull-terrier; the same sort of hair-trigger steadiness. At home in the jungle. At home in the tent. Neither man nor snake would disturb Madame de Gerville with Hakim around.

Hakim (Number So-and-So in the secret files of the C. I. D.) sent off reports.

Sir Hugh Wulverston had recently recrossed the border from Tibet into India. With his daughter Grail. The mother of the girl, widow of the late Commandant de Gerville, Pondichéry, was now on her way to meet Sir Hugh at Bawani Tol.

And with this as a cornerstone, Agent No. — (alias Hakim), as usual at the center of things, revealed to his superiors, the spreading drama of that ruined jungle temple called Bawani Tol.

It was no less a personage than Manju Bahadur, surnamed the Bear, who personally contributed important information to Hakim in this connection.

Dost Mohammed (Craig's bearer), Hakim, and Manju Bahadur, sat smoking at the bright little fire in their camp the night the message from Craig came back.

"They'll be awaiting us at Bawani Tol," said Manju Baloo. "A good place for secret business across the northern border. All the better because difficult of access."

Neither Dost Mohammed nor Hakim spoke. They were not men to spit in the fire or speak out of turn. Otherwise, this fighting elder would not be treating them as equals.

"I learned that the Angerzi, this woman's husband"—and Manju motioned with his head toward Madame de Gerville's tent—"was seeking an agent to forward certain cases of books to one of the great ones in Lassa. An agent was found for him. At the same time one who bore my name but who had another face had certain arms requiring shipment. There was transport for only the one or the other."

Manju reflected bitterly.

"It was great labor to dump the books and use the boxes for the arms. But the work was neatly done. Work that was never paid for and which came to nothing since the arms were seized."

Just out of politeness, Hakim put in: "But he who engineered the shipment of arms. He must have paid."

"With his life," said disfigured Manju. "And thus the man who bore my name became an ally of the British Raj."

"*Husur!*" both Dost Mohammed and Hakim murmured by way of polite applause.

Manju ate smoke.

"The tale is not yet ended," he said. "The man who bore my name himself owed a debt—to the husband of this woman. When this husband, although a babu and not a fighting man, was unjustly condemned for shipping arms, it was the man who bore my name who carried the Ingrezi babu into Tibet. Likewise, he who carried back a message for the woman over there. But he was waylaid and stripped by the agents of the British Raj. He was flung into prison and the writing disappeared."

Manju cocked an ear. From the jungle toward the south there came the weird cry of a frightened jackal—a "*Fee-anwh-h-h!*" ending in a shudder.

"The jackal sees a stalking tiger," Manju announced simply. "It was to similar music that the man who bore my name, once out of prison, again sought the high passes, this time to tell the Ingrezi babu that his message had never been delivered. And now he bore the babu company coming back. But lo, now, when they found the woman at last she was married to another. So they stole the little girl and they took her away into Tibet."

Manju laughed. But there was something in that laugh to remind both Hakim and Dost Mohammed of the jackal's cry.

"You'd think," he concluded, "that now when they met him—he who bore my name—they'd know him. Him they've forgotten. They know only—Manju the Bear. . . ."

Since they were following the Tiger

Trail and moving slowly on account of Manju's leg, the distance covered by Craig in some twelve or fourteen hours stretched on and on.

Dost Mohammed, supplied with packers by Manju, had hurried on ahead to Bawani Tol, where Craig Sahib would need razor and toothbrush!

Only Manju, Madame de Gerville and Hakim still in camp—apart from the shifting packers and trackers, woodchoppers and headmen who came and went. Not a conscript or an hireling among them. Free subjects, these were, of Manju the Bear. Volunteers.

Hakim heard, saw, interpreted. There'd be a battle of some sort before many days near the ruined temple called Bawani Tol. But a family quarrel. In a native state. It was not one in which the great British Raj could stoop to intervene.

Strange jungle tramps came and went. Hakim found amusement apparently in listening to their strange vernacular. He himself could speak all the languages of the hills. Some tramps left and others came—yogis, exorcisors, cattle thieves, smugglers.

And somewhere a man at a desk—a sort of benign yet dangerous spider at the center of his web—received daily accounts of developments in Indarabad and the neighboring hills.

There'd been a rather unholy odor from Indarabad since the death of the old maharajah. Pretty thick, the things that passed in most of the native states anyway. But their own business, so long as they kept it to themselves. But Shri Bahadur had been rather overreaching. Trying to involve Lady Wulverston! Yes. She'd become Lady Wulverston again, of course, along with vindication for Sir Hugh. . . .

That was one thing though on which Hakim would make no secret report.

*"Chota hazri, Memsahib!"*

*"Achacha, Hakim!"*

And Hakim would step into the lady's sleeping tent at the break of day with a tea service as clean—and no more personal—than himself.

Not a word, not a look, never a smile,

the perfect automaton. Yet somehow, Hakim both saw and comprehended. Madame de Gerville felt that he did. They spoke no word of a personal sort even when they were following the rough and dangerous trail. But to Madame de Gerville, Hakim was a support without which she could never have gone on.

She realized this most when she heard Hakim pronounce, at last, a familiar yet incredible name.

She'd been at her familiar evening task of dressing the wounds of Manju Bahadur. The wounds, both on arm and leg, were healing nicely. They'd have healed more quickly still had Manju permitted himself to be carried. But—Shiva Vishnu!—did they take him for a woman?

And scarcely had Hakim pronounced that familiar name before Manju the Bear himself sprang up, almost upsetting Madame de Gerville, who'd been kneeling by the wounded leg.

*"Sir Hugh Wulverston!"*

How had Hakim known—been so quick and sure? As Madame de Gerville saw that aged and ghostly man coming toward her at the head of a dozen coolies, she felt that she would rather have faced a tiger.

Hugh—her mind ran—sixty now. Looking eighty. It was she who was responsible for those added years. It was an added reproach to herself that she now divined that his fear of this meeting was as great as her own. Greater! She'd caught the gleam of hope in his mild eyes as he saw the horror that was Manju standing there with the bandage slipping from his leg.

*"Ah, yes! A work of mercy!"*—she could almost hear his voice.

She'd forgotten to move. She was still kneeling on the ground as she heard Manju's greeting:

*"Now behold the joy of my one good eye! My father and my mother! Sahib!"*

Lord Wulverston made a slight gesture with his joined fingertips toward his forehead. He was smiling, mild, as he looked at his wife.

*"Hugh!"* she muttered from her knees.

He put out his hand and helped her

to her feet. Both of them were trembling like stage-struck children.

Hakim salaamed.—"I'll serve tea immediately in Memsahib's tent."

They'd barely entered the tent before Sir Hugh, after a quick look about him, said: "Agnes, have you and Grail—"

He stopped as he saw her blank look. "Grail!"

"She's not here?"

"No!"

They stood looking at each other. Their hands met—and clung. They were in each other's arms, fused as if by some sudden flash of dread.

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE TRAP



RAIL had started out to meet her mother the day before. The distance was no longer very great. Craig had accompanied her as far as Bawani village—the little jungle hamlet where they first had met. There she'd commanded him to go back. Sir Hugh would be waiting.

There'd sprung up a most responsive and mutually inspiring friendship between Craig and Lord Wolverston—strong because it wasn't mere sentiment. There was an intellectual bond between them—both engrossed in their kindred specialties of writing and art.

Anyway, Dost Mohammed, carrying a gun, was Grail's sufficient escort.

Next morning, Dost Mohammed would escort Sir Hugh, shaken but dreaming, to Madame de Gerville's camp, by which time Grail would have eased the way.

Night passed. Dost Mohammed hadn't returned. Rather disappointing. But, after all, no occasion for either anger or alarm. Along toward noon, Sir Hugh was on his way—leggings, topi, his least shabby suit, and a quaking heart. Him also Craig accompanied to Bawani jungletown, where Sir Hugh picked up a native escort.

Craig returned alone to Bawani Tol, the temple. Bawani Tol, like so many other temples in this part of the world, had originally been more of a scattered town of buildings than a single structure,

although it was the main building where they lived that was known as the temple.

A vast building, of three receding or setback stories, built of stone, partly open and partly enclosed, with a broad vestibule and terrace on the lower floor.

As Craig was just mounting the steps of this terrace, he saw someone lying on the ground at the further end.

It was Mohammed—not dead, but nearly. He'd been beaten and choked. Then left for dead—as the story came out, after Craig had worked on him for an hour or so. Craig with no one to help him. Bawani village far beyond hail.

And Grail?

"Allah take my life for hers!" Dost Mohammed didn't know. He had been ambushed by twenty men. Grail had been carried off. The only thing he could be certain of was this was the work of that Shaitan's spawn, Shri Bahadur.

Craig got the old man to at least a comparative state of survival and was off to the village. Not many but the feeble elders and children were left in the village, but he got such help as he could and sent out an appeal for more.

He was half frantic. He couldn't leave Dost Mohammed to die of neglect. The old man had been a mother and a father to him, as he'd been to his mother's father and his mother herself.

He was running back to where he'd left Dost Mohammed—it was now coming along toward dark—when he thought he heard a cry. . . . Grail's voice!

And it nearly stopped his heart, like the squeeze of a hand, although he became immediately convinced that he couldn't have heard the cry except in his brain.

He stood there looking out through the ruined and overgrown combination of haunted temples and jungle when he heard a distant thud and a splintering of wood. He stood considering the strangeness of this and holding his breath. Woodchoppers never came to this part of the jungle. They held a universal belief in *bhuts*—in ghosts. These old temples were haunted.

"Brandon!"

It wasn't a sound and yet he heard it. It might have been as one hears a voice in his memory. He was remembering other things—the tiger she'd seen—the tiger-trap her father had devised. He didn't even know where the thing was, or what it consisted of.

But now that thud and splintering of wood took on significance.

It wasn't until he'd flung himself against a makeshift door of one of the buildings that it occurred to him that he wasn't armed. If it occurred to him then.

Then there it was—the picture before him complete.

The building itself was stone with thick walls—a single oblong room about ten feet by twenty and a high ceiling, possibly eighteen feet. For the last three feet of this height the walls, instead of being solid as they were below, consisted of close-set stone pilasters.

The original purpose of the building flashed on him at once. This had been a burial chamber, and the significance of it was merely some slight contribution to the general horror.

There was the tiger. There was Grail.

Between them there was a sort of wooden screen which Craig recognized at once as the work of a not very experienced or enthusiastic amateur. Grail's father had built the screen. It completely blocked off perhaps five feet at the end of the chamber. The whole thing had been constructed of saplings and withes. In a lower corner of the screen was a small door similarly constructed and now held shut by twisted withes.

Lord Wolverston's intention was manifest. He'd intended to bait his trap with a live goat or kid. But instead of allowing the creature to be slain, the lure would be placed behind the screen.

The tiger would be attracted just the same. There'd been the beginning of some sort of a contrivance to close the outer door by the tiger's own weight, once the brute had entered.

Then—well, if a native cared to—he could shoot the tiger in safety from those openings above.

So simple. So swift. Revealing yet staggering like a flash of lightning too near.

Other details—with Craig still on the threshold.

Grail, white as a phantom, looking as if she were already dead—not from this present terror but as if this were merely the climax of peril and violence long sustained. Clothes torn. Jungle stains of mud and slime.

Then the tigress, making a game of this.

"He who has never seen a tiger, let him look at a cat."

The creature—of the deeper orange that Grail had mentioned, lying stretched out on its side. It was an acme of grace and luxurious ease while at the same time displaying such cunning, speed and strength as only a tiger knows.

"Stop it!" roared Craig.

The tiger stopped. While it lay there, it had already got one massive foreleg through the screen. With another it was trying to drag a sapling sufficiently out of line to bite it. One of the great hind legs stroked the saplings like the arm of a harper.

At Craig's mad shout, the massive beast was up and crouched and facing him as quickly as a snake.

All that luxuriousness now gone from it. Ears flat. Eyes drawn to a sharper angle and narrowed, Craig saw the claws working at the floor. The floor was stone. He saw a flick of the tail. In an instant he knew, the tiger would spring. Realization of this came to him with a sense almost of levitation—as if a crisping of nerves were actually raising him from the floor.

Nothing could save him. Not even had he wanted to run. But the thought of running away and leaving Grail here—even for minutes—for one minute—never entered his head.

Somehow, unfolded in that purpose that held him here was a memory of the goatherd that had been killed outside Bawani village. If the tiger killed one, it was satisfied. It would feed. It would go away.

Just on the hairline between time and eternity, Grail flung herself down the length of her little prison, she screamed and kicked at the bars.

At least there was no gorgeous intellect inside that gorgeous skull of the tiger. The thought shocked Craig to life again. The tiger had shown another astonishing change at Grail's rush. It had as if forgotten Craig as it snatched a crashing blow at the barrier. But the green saplings held.

"Grail, darling! Careful!"

"Run! Run!" she pleaded. "I'm all right."

"I'll be right back!"

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### PRIMEVAL

**H**E was back quicker than he thought he'd be. Even as he stepped from the little temple that had been transformed into a tiger trap he knew that he could go no further. It was as if he were caught in a paralyzing web—something physical; he couldn't go on. Death had him in its clutch—not his own death, necessarily, but Death!

There was a swirling instant of time when time itself escaped all experience. Then he was himself again—master of his nerves—almost calm. Instantly he saw what he had to do. There was a weapon to his hand.

The weapon was leaning there against the wall. It was one of those tough young trees that Grail's father had cut and trimmed when he was at work on his tiger trap. It was like a wooden spear, ten or twelve feet long, three or four inches thick, sharpened at one end to a tapering point.

It flashed on Craig that tigers had been killed here in the jungle, many a time, with less effective weapons. All in the same moment he had seized it. The green wood was as heavy as iron—and as strong.

Almost before he could realize what he was doing he was back in the little stone chamber again—his primitive spear poised in both hands. The tiger was reared there

with its back to him—looming high, occupied with its business of tearing at the barrier that separated it from the girl.

Craig struck. The sharp stake drove into the striped body a little under one of the mammoth squirming shoulders. The wood drove deep.

There was a ripping screech like that of sudden thunder and Craig was caught into a vortex of clawed and strangling battle. . . .

**W**ITH the escape of Grail Wulverston from the band of thugs who had ambushed her—and half-killed Dost Mahommed—other forces had been released. That chase of the thugs to recapture the girl had covered incredible miles—of jungle low and high. No sounding-board like the hills, no hills like the Himalayas.

A girl less trained than Grail—and trained in hills like these, would have been dead or taken within the first quarter of an hour. Higher and higher the chase had gone, and down into valleys she had never seen before. Yet never running blind. Always knowing where she was. Running, hiding, resting, like a sambur doe. Ever with the singleness of purpose that the wild doe feels when the chase is fierce—to escape and join her mate.

There was a spiritual quality to it, so far as Grail was concerned, and this sustained her through the night. She'd found an earth-god. It was a demonstration of all the old legends. She loved. She was loved. . . .

It wasn't until long after dawn that she dared work her way back toward Bawani Tol. She could see that the place was surrounded. There were camps everywhere. Yet she must return to Bawani Tol. She was beginning to be afflicted by the killing torment that Craig also might have been attacked—wounded—killed. Yet she didn't dare precipitate matters by recklessness or impatience.

As a matter of fact, that long chase and gradual tightening of a cordon around the valley of the temples had also been in the nature of a tiger-beat. That richly

colored tiger that Grail had seen twice before had also spent an evil day and night.

He was looking for a way out into his game-trail when he saw Grail slip by—as attractive to him as any moving thing is to any cat. He followed her. About this game with which he had never experimented before there was a dread fascination.

Noiselessly, cautiously, he followed.

Grail had almost reached Bawani Tol when a scent rather than a sound made her turn.

There was the tiger, very near. She stood still. The tiger froze. She moved. So did the tiger. . . .

She'd never reach the main building of Bawani Tol. But there was the tiger trap. She'd helped her father to build it. It was she who had fashioned that wicket gate. Had it been otherwise—

The door pushed open. The tiger had followed her. Almost friendly it had seemed at first. It was only after the first few pulseless seconds that she remembered how cats were friendly with captured mice. . . .

Now, as Craig and the tiger went over into that whirl of a death struggle, the girl forced her way from the broken cage and followed.

Man and tiger had been spun from the small building into the open. There Grail followed them.

Suddenly it seemed to her as if the solitude of Bawani Tol had spawned a multitude.

**A**LL this time there had been that gradual, yet swift, concentration of other warring elements on Bawani Tol. It was the thing that Hakim had foreseen. This was civil war—one of those endless little wars in the native states of India of which the outside world seldom hears and which are not worth more than a drowsy glance even from the British lion.

First of all, there was the small army that Shri Bahadur had led back into the hills. It had come to Shri Bahadur as a terrific shock when he learned that Grail

had escaped from the band of thugs he'd sent to kidnap her. The girl was the only prize the world could offer him that he still desired—the one prize the world had thus far denied him.

Have her he must, whatever the price.

His forces had just reached Bawani Tol and were ready for the rush when they heard that sound of battle from the remote little temple. Shri Bahadur and his followers were tiger-hunters to a man. They could read something of the meaning of that roaring shriek and the noises that followed.

Shri Bahadur cried an order and instantly he was on the run toward the tiger trap with a hundred followers trailing after him.

They weren't to have the field to themselves.

As the news of Grail's disappearance had broken in the little camp where Sir Hugh and his wife had met, it was like the cataclysmic unloosing of a landslide.

Manju was the active agent—Baloo, the Bear. From that scarred face of his he'd belled a note like that of a gaur, one of the earth's largest cattle. It was a roar, a trumpet. And as a crowd might gather out of nowhere on some empty country road in another part of the world the jungle began to spawn a crowd there then—gaining numbers as it swept along—a human spate.

And Manju, his wounds forgotten, at the head of it—informing not only those about him but such wild gods as he might have favored that this thing should never be.

The only child of this woman who had nursed his wounds—mother of this only girl he'd ever seen who was worthy of a throne—lost here in these, his native hills.

O, Ghosts! O, Rimau Krinat (God of Tigers)! O, Dorje Pamo (the Pig-faced Goddess)!

Despite his age, the fighting-chief was covering ground. Someone had given him his gun. His army grew. Just as he was beginning to tire, two ragged cutthroats whipped a sort of litter under him and tripped him into it.

Better so. He could roar again. And now others were roaring with him.

*"Bande Mataram!"*

Spaced and rolled to a tempo of thunder in the mountains. And the "mother" (mataram) they saluted and bade to live long was Mother Himalaya. The mother herself caught up their rolling shout and enriched it with echoes. The echoes brought recruits.

They also had arrived at Bawani Tol just as the tiger screamed.

Old Manju's horde—running, carrying him who was their type of what a leader should be. Not beautiful. Not stylish. The sahib business was a curse when mixed with natural appetites.

One thing also was desired by Manju the Bear. He saw his chance to get it at the price of a single cartridge.

While all the others were transfixed and fascinated by the tiger scream, and then what followed, Manju was searching—searching.

He had a comprehension as perfect of his cousin the maharajah's technique as some old primary teacher has of a child's sum in arithmetic.

The stunned crowd saw the young sahib catapulted from the door of the tiger trap by a backward-slinging, writhing tiger spitted on a ten-foot stake.

Craig was still clinging to the stake as he and the tiger both rolled. Craig still clung to the stake when he came up to his knees and the tiger's movements went slower—slower—

Old tiger men, in this gathering, but they'd never seen anything quite like this. For the time being, even the fierce joys of a general fratricidal slaughter were forgotten.

While the attention of all the others was still fixed on the tiger and the white sahib and then the girl, over there at the tiger trap, another sort of drama exploded with the suddenness of a dream.

Shri Bahadur had rushed forward armed with no more than a long knife. Those who saw him thought that he meant to strike a death blow at the tiger. It was at the American he aimed the blow.

Before the blow could fall old Manju—Baloo the Bear—had jerked up his gun and fired. The bullet took the maharajah through the neck—jerking him over sideways, where he lay and kicked. It was a sight that brought a shout of laughter from Manju's men.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### CORONATION



EVER from the moment that Manju Baloo—he liked that surname of "The Bear" and was going to make it official—registered that perfect shot that killed his cousin, the ruler of Indarabad, was there the slightest doubt in the minds of those there as to who the next maharajah would be. As a matter of fact, you couldn't have found anyone else who would have taken the job. Not with Manju the Bear as a claimant.

Manju himself had no doubt, either. Gradually, it had penetrated his understanding, probably by direct suggestion from Hakim, that it might be a good investment to dispense a trifle in the way of lead and steel to save the Bahadur family honor.

"I did it," said Manju. "I not only did it, but I acquired additional merit by saving a good life while disposing of a bad one."

He was still allowing himself to be carried as he expressed the wish to congratulate the sahib tiger-slayer.

As the tough old mountain-lord looked down at Craig's work, he shouted loudly that this sahib was a son of his and let no one forget it. Then he took another tack. Practically everyone there knew that he'd made violent play for the favor of this maiden.

"And if you do lose your girl," he said, "may it be to a man!"

Everyone laughed and cheered.

Craig and Grail got to their feet as Manju stood before them. He was the first to congratulate them on becoming man and wife.

It gave them a shock, but they liked it. Until then they'd never thought of

marriage—except in a sort of vague, ethereal way. But Manju was a realist.

"Come ye down to Indarabad," he said, "and be wed by the maharajah. I'll give you a wedding to shame a viceroy's durbar!"

It was nearly that when it did come off. But in the meantime Craig had other things that occupied his mind. He'd been sent out to India by a group of museums interested in ancient Aryan architecture. His grandfather's old stamping-ground. And he'd counted a lot on such aid as he might receive from the young ruler he'd known and tried to like. It was infinitely better as things were now, in a number of ways.

For one thing, Manju kept after him trying to get Craig to be his prime minister. Manju knew he wasn't very strong on manners and education. He wanted someone who'd offset his lack in this respect.

"I'd want a lot of reforms," said Craig. "Schools, hospitals, sewers, a guarded water-supply, lower taxes, better roads, conservation of public monuments and historic sites."

"I'm for them all," said the new maharajah.

"All right," said Craig, "there's your man."

And he pointed to his future father-in-law.

Lord and Lady Wulverston had come down from the hills together. They were to be present at the wedding. Lady Wulverston was certainly as beautiful as ever. She was one of those women whose beauty would be slow to fade.

Sight of her beauty, Craig could see, was appealing to the new maharajah now. There'd be consolation of sorts to the Bear to have the lady about—even as the faithful wife of another. Yes, the maharajah was falling, with enthusiasm, for Craig's suggestion.

The wedding came off after the rains—after there'd been a chance also to refurbish the palace at Indarabad town and train a new lot of servants.

The old servants had been fine—smooth footed and discreet. But there would have always been the danger of one of them forgetting himself and experimenting with poison.

Guests from all over India and not a few out from London and New York this time. The *shamiana* was twice as big as the old one—it had to be; so was the *gadi*, or throne—a double-decker now, like one trunk on top of another, both of them gold.

And there was something great in seeing Manju up there—dressed in gold—and his unearthly face grinning with grief. He was like an avatar of one of the mythical old Hindu gods come back to rule in Indarabad.

Only a few months ago, Craig had fallen under the spell of a Madame de Gerville. The air was aswoon with attar of roses, just as it was now. He closed his eyes a moment. He opened them again and looked down at his dancing partner. Yes, here she was again. Named Grail, now, instead of Agnes—but a Madame de Gerville miraculously younger, more beautiful, undeniably and forever his own.

(The End)



# Range Domain

AN ACTION ROMANCE OF THE  
VIVID WEST

By  
H. C. WIRE

*Frontispiece by*  
STEPHEN WAITE



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He heard behind him the unmistakable ring of a horse's shoe. "We're being followed," he said. . . . (Page 150.)

# RANGE DOMAIN

## CHAPTER ONE

### A STRANGER RIDES



TRAVELING light and rapidly enough to keep the news behind him, a lone horseman pushed up from the sink of the Painted Desert and approached the high rimrock of Jackson Mesa.

He was traveling north; on his left the copper Arizona sun shone low and level across the broken plain, softening it and hiding the barren torture of the desert over which he had fought his way since dawn. Ahead, the square-cut bluffs of Jackson Mesa were mysteriously black where canyon mouths notched the sheer rock or burnished gold where sunset struck upon the towering rim.

Tipping his head far back, the man gazed upon those heights, squinting sharply, though he was not looking into the sun; and when his eyes shifted downward again they searched minutely each darkening pocket of the wall.

The horse stumbled. The man picked him up with tightening reins. "Keep on, old skipper." His voice was husky and low.

The animal kept on. He was a tall black, clean-limbed and sensitive, his one-man loyalty marked even now by slender ears strained to catch any word from this

figure upon him, and by his instant response. Clearly, too, the rider upheld his part in this bond of understanding.

He was a young man, of less than twenty-five, with a lean, brown face, tawny brown hair showing beneath his wide, limp hat brim, and quiet gray eyes. Although wearied, he rode with the easy grace of a man who has straddled a horse almost since the first day that he learned to walk. Out of the saddle he would have been tall, rangy, hard-boiled; a sort to be let alone.

His dress was that of a cowhand, stitched black boots, blue jeans, blue cotton shirt and creased gray hat. Behind his saddle was tied a yellow slicker rolled about a blanket. At his horn a rope was coiled. Yet down his right thigh hung a heavy Colt six-shooter, and the manner of its hanging was eloquent.

The holster had no top flap, and at the bottom buckskin thongs went round the man's leg, holding the holster firm for a quick and certain draw. Plainly the gun was more important in his life than that coiled cowhand's rope.

Twice this day, once in the morning and again early in the afternoon, he had swung wide from the desert trail to avoid a meeting. The last time it had been two men, also riding north, but far off on his left hand. Their paths might have intersected. He had angled eastward and had

not come back to the trail again through-out the afternoon.

He was looking for it now. That pair of horsemen had vanished, drifting back into the desert, or perhaps following up one of the distant draws of Jackson Mesa.

The trail, little used lately, was an old one and had never been well defined. It could strike up any one of the dozen mesa maws that yawned before him. And, farther on, these first canyons branched, forked, ended in boxed walls, then began again. A stranger going into Hidden Spring Valley had to have the trail.

The man rode on, leaning from his saddle to search the ground over which he passed. His quiet gray eyes peered down patiently, unhurried—Indian eyes, sharpened to the least sign of hoof-scarred rock or stunted grass to mark the lost way.

There was none. Full dark came before the man halted. He pushed up the hat from his forehead, pulled out a blue bandanna and wiped the dust from his face. A tension had come there, aging him momentarily in the tightening of lines about his mouth and the puckering of his lids into a grim squint. He stared long into the solid blackness of the canyon confronting him, shifted in his saddle and threw back his head to scan the heights of the mesa walls. He looked back over the way he had come, then sat listening.

It was the horse that moved first. A night breeze had sprung up, blowing gently from deeper in the canyon. The black thrust out his muzzle, the intake of his breath whistling. Instantly the man reached forward and clamped his hand over the horse's nostrils.

"Easy, Skip!" he said under his breath. "Not so loud. What do you smell, water?"

Skipper twitched a velvet ear.

"Yeah," said the man. "But if it's a spring there might be someone around."

He eased himself from the saddle, dropped his reins, took a step. As if upon afterthought, he turned back and instead of letting the reins hang he hooked them on the saddle horn.

Skip eyed the man knowingly as he walked away.

There was a spring, all right, about a hundred yards up the dry wash. But the man did not approach it directly. When the cool feeling came upon his cheek, and the air carried an unmistakable pungent smell of watered grass, he began a circle, and moved silently around the small basin there in the canyon bottom. He stopped often to listen. His gaze shifted over the ground underfoot, up along the rimrock above, stabbed the night about him. Satisfied, he walked across to the spring.

There was only a small round puddle in barren rock, and it watered but a short strip of grass. Yet it was sweet. The horseman pulled off his hat and drank gratefully, thrusting his face in deep. Rising then upon his knees, he groped outward along the dark bank for his hat. His fingers touched cold metal. He jerked back. But there had come a sudden snap of steel, and saw-tooth jaws bit into his wrist.

Shock brought an involuntary grunt from him. Pain did not come for the moment, and he tore at the steel as any trapped animal would have done.

The metal rang upon rock; its chain rattled. Too late, the man checked himself and smothered the sound of his struggle. For on the cliff above a gun crashed, a slug thudded into the pool at his side and there came the clatter of men sliding down the canyon wall.

The man's right hand was in the trap, but his left was free, and with it he jerked the six-gun from his holster.

"Drop it!"

The order came at his back. It was then that he realized how clearly his dark form must show against the mirroring pool of water. He let the gun fall.

Instantly two men were upon him, one from in front and one behind. A boot heel jabbed down and opened the jaws of the trap. Before he could move a fist struck him over on his side. Furiously, he fought his assailants, but he was clubbed, sat upon, bound with rope. Then the two stood up.

"There, now, Mister," said a breath-

less voice. "I guess that about sews up your little game!"

## CHAPTER TWO

ED RHODES

**I**N the cool of the late evening Jeff Lockhart sat on the wide front gallery of his ranch house, gazing out upon a world made strangely different by a thing he had learned this day. He was going to die.

Every man faces that certainty sooner or later, and Jeff Lockhart, old range warrior that he was, had already taken his chances with the Grim Reaper in many ways. But those ways had been in the course of swift action, in the high blood of Indian fights or rustlers' wars. No time then to think about it. But this, to know beforehand, almost to the week. . . .

There was a commotion down at his corrals beyond a short lane of cottonwoods. Jeff stood up and squinted through the shadowy evening light. Some riders had ridden in. That was all. He resumed his seat on the gallery bench.

For a long time he sat as motionless as granite, hands on his knees, his body bent a little forward.

Jeff Lockhart was sixty-five, a short, spare man with snow-white hair. His face was smooth-shaven, except for a gray mustache cut straight across his broad upper lip. Lines were deep in his sunburned skin; his expression was sharp, exacting—a determined face, that of a fighting man. Yet a pair of blue eyes looked out of it with the friendly tolerance of one who has made his place in a grim world and knows where he stands.

In the last days of Geronimo and his Apache "tigers of the desert," Jeff Lockhart had come drifting up into the mesa lands of Arizona, bent on making for himself a ranch, a home and a family.

He had done so, being a man of single purpose. But between that first year and this he had spent a lifetime in the battle of carrying out his aim.

There had been Indian wars and Mexican raids, then the curse that came to

most successful ranchmen—the rustlers. Through each difficulty in turn he had persisted. Through dry years, through the attempted inroads of squatters and sheepmen, through months when his chances were not worth a dollar, he had fought them all and made himself a home.

Today from his front gallery as far as he could see, south down the Hidden Spring Valley, east to Lost Horse Mesa, west to Cliff House Canyon, was all country under his hand. Whether he owned it section by section, or not, was a different matter. He controlled the springs and water holes, and by virtue of that the land was his.

Until tonight Jeff Lockhart had taken life for granted. It would go on indefinitely. In time, of course, he would have to make certain plans for the future. . . . Now that time had come. Those things he had been putting off must be planned for at once. He believed the truth of what Doc Evans had said today. There would be about six months more.

Jeff stood up, walked to one of the gallery posts and stood leaning against it filling his pipe. There was still a commotion of voices at the corrals, and he had a mind to go down to see what was the matter.

He was uneasy, for much trouble had broken out on the range this year. It would seem that rustlers hanging upon the fringe of his domain had realized the old war-horse was not what he used to be and had started new operations. Running them out was one thing upon which he must plan tonight.

Jeff stuffed his pipe and got it going. He had, in fact, begun his plan a week ago. He had sent to the Drovers' Association for a range detective. Times past he would have hooted at getting an outside man. He would have swung into the saddle himself, led his cowboys and cleaned up the pack of thieving coyotes with a few rounds of lead.

But times had changed, and so had he. That tightening around his heart was a warning that those war rides were over. And, too, what was happening among the far herds of his cattle was not being done

in the old manner. Bunches were not driven off with a rush, a dash for cover and a quick turn to some ready market. Jeff thought he knew all the rustlers' tricks—rebranding through a wet blanket, the skilful refashioning of brands, the cut drift fences through which cattle wandered and never returned. Yet the deals being pulled off on him now were new and varied, so he had sent outside for a professional in this man-hunting game.

That was the first of his problems which must be solved soon. The second. . . .

A door opened behind him. A gay voice said, "Hello, Dad! So this is where you are!" Steps tapped across the gallery; a freshness filled the night air, and Jeff Lockhart's second problem stood at his side.

He turned, smiling at the girl, but in that smile was worry. "You're late getting in, Ellen. Everything all right?"

Her answer was evasive. "I rode farther into Cliff House Canyon than I expected, Dad." Then, at once, "What did Doc Evans say?"

"Fit as a fiddle," said Jeff.

The girl came closer, her face tipped up to him. "I don't believe that!"

"All right, then," Jeff replied. "Doc said there was not a thing for me to be bothered about." And that was true. Old Jeff had not the least concern over what might happen to himself.

He was, though, concerned mightily over what would happen to his girl afterwards. He wanted to plan on that. Yet what plans could be made? This was a ranch as big as some states, with cattle by the thousands, a string of cowhands as wild as they were hard-working, and, now, trouble again. It would be hers, the management, troubles and all.

Some of the old-time brush-poppers here could be depended upon to give the girl advice. And, of course, there was the kid, Artie Bell, who worshiped Ellen. In his boy's way he would fight and die for her. But she needed more than these; she needed the one man whose strength and courage and protection would be hers be-

cause he loved her. If only Ellen were married. . . .

It was a big order, Jeff realized. No halfway sort would do; and the man's worth must be proved. Where would such a one come from, in the next six months? Not a chance in the world!

Looking down at his daughter, he had to admit that, in spite of her smallness and the feminine qualities in her which he knew so well, she stood there on her louted feet with the firmness and self-assurance of a pretty capable little person.

Ellen Lockhart was twenty. There was a slim, brown-haired boyishness about her now as she stood stuffing a pair of gauntlet gloves into her blue jeans pocket. Dust of a long ride was upon her high-heeled boots. A cotton shirt lay open at her throat, with a large red bandanna knotted there and tossed back over her left shoulder. Her face was tanned, warm, with a direct friendly expression; and in the straight appraisal of her dark eyes she was a bit of old Jeff Lockhart.

"I'd like to know," said Jeff suddenly, peering into the night, "what all the ruckus is about down at the corrals."

Cowboys from other ranches had been whooping in all day. He understood that. Tomorrow began the Flying Arrow's spring round-up, and reps from distant owners to the south and west were arriving to be on hand. They had come in on the run, by twos or in groups, with a yell of good spirit and a slapdash show in the management of their horses. Some might even have collected a drink along the way to fortify themselves for the hard week ahead.

But there was a troublesome wrangling of voices in the bunk shacks now.

Jeff stepped from the gallery. "If those reps think—"

Ellen took his arm. "Wait, Dad," she said. "Wait a minute."

He swung about, facing her.

"I don't think it's anything serious, yet," she offered. "I saw Al Fanning and Dusty Ragan coming this way this afternoon. They must be down there in the bunkhouse."

"That pair!" Jeff said with heat. "I

told them last year to stay off this place."

"But you can't do that," Ellen calmed him. "They have a right to look through our cut in the round-up. They might have some strays. You can't keep them off."

"Can't, huh?" Jeff flamed.

Ellen laughed, her voice low and soft in the night. "Old Grizzly! Let that go for now, and listen to me. Did George Starr and old Hardpan Moore get back from the desert?"

"Haven't seen 'em," said Jeff. "Why?"

"They should have been in by this time, shouldn't they?"

"Yes, but— Say, what is it you know?"

"Nothing. Only I was late getting in myself tonight because I heard a shot down by Silver Spring. I rode along the mesa, but it was dark by that time and I was really afraid. Just a single shot like that. Why did they go down there anyway, Dad?"

"You know I never question Starr's daily riding," Jeff declared. But he stood scowling into the night, south in the direction of Silver Spring. The girl's query disturbed him.

The wrangling in the bunkhouse subsided a little. It was then that the sound of horses being ridden rapidly came out of the dark.

Ellen caught her breath. Lockhart stood fixed. The sound drew near, beating directly up the cottonwood lane and avoiding the corrals. Three horses burst suddenly into sight as if through a black velvet curtain, swung toward the house, wheeled to a halt in a dust fog before the gallery step.

By the time the dust settled two men had dismounted. The third remained in his saddle, for he was bound there, his arms tied behind his back, his feet caught by a rope under the horse's belly and cinched down close.

"Evenin', boss," said a gruff, self-assured voice. "Me and Hardpan got us a coyote in one of those traps we set near the spring. Kind of a cross betwixt a skunk. Different than we expected. Better look him over."

Jeff stepped back and opened a door so that lamplight flooded out.

"Come up here, George," he said. "You, too, Hardpan, if your coyote won't get away."

Two lank, gray forms clumped up onto the gallery. George Starr was Lockhart's range boss, a man past fifty, with a lean, lined face, and thin, sun-bleached hair. Hardpan Moore, as silent as a shadow behind him, might have been his twin.

It was Starr who spoke. "We see this jasper down on Painted Desert," he explained in detail, "but when he sights us he swings off. So when he wants to avoid meetin' us we naturally want to be met. We see he was travelin' light, and that meant he would have to head for water when he camped. There bein' only one water hole to head for, we went up on the bluff above Silver Spring and waited.

"Sure enough, along he comes; pussy-footin' it up and leavin' his horse, then circlin' around before he decides to take a drink. With things happenin' the way they have on this range, and a man bein' so doggone bashful like that, we makes up our minds to bring him in. So we do, and there he is."

Starr jerked a thumb at the man, and, as far as he was concerned, it was all explained. Behind him Hardpan Moore seconded Starr's story with a nod.

"Says he's a grub-liner," Starr derided. "Well, maybe so. Maybe I'm a flyin' mud-turtle, too! What shall I do with him, huh?"

"Leave him here," said Jeff. "You and Hardpan go down and get yourselves fed. Calm that bunkhouse crowd while you're about it. Then come on back."

"Here's his gun," Starr offered, handing out a six-shooter. "One thing I'll say for him, he swings a couple o' mean fists! Don't get too close."

The pair vanished, riding off toward the corrals. Jeff stepped across the gallery and looked up at the prisoner.

"Grub-liner, are you?"

Times were hard in the lower country. Many cowhands, out of jobs, had ridden from ranch to ranch through the winter months, getting a meal or two at each stop, and so managing to live. But none of these grub-liners had yet reached the

mesa highlands; none had appeared at any of the camps of Jeff Lockhart's Flying Arrow—unless this happened to be one.

Jeff surveyed him dubiously. "Well? Speak up! Grub-liner, are you?"

Quiet, gray eyes looked down.

"If you are Jeff Lockhart," said a cool voice, "you're the man I'm looking for."

Jeff snorted. "You're looking for me!"

"That's right. Let me down from here and we'll talk."

The old ranchman stood motionless for a moment in the surprise and amazement of this salm self-assurance.

"Go ahead, Dad."

Lockhart jerked around.

"Let him down," said Ellen. She stood in the dark at the left of the doorway and held in her hand the man's own gun. "Let him come down. I've got him covered."

In a moment she opened the door screen and pushed it back with one foot. "Take him inside."

Jeff passed through the doorway, with the prisoner a step ahead. Ellen turned and closed the door, and presently the three were alone in a wide, long living room.

"Now, then," said the ranchman, "let's hear your song and dance!"

The quiet, gray eyes shifted once around the room in a gaze that plainly missed nothing. It was a look that gathered facts, accurately and swiftly. One sweep, and this tall newcomer could quite probably tell the details of everything round about him.

His glance came back to Jeff Lockhart, traveled on from him, and then, for the first time, fell fully upon the girl. There it rested. His face was toward the lamp-light, lean, clear-cut in the lines of cheeks and nose and jaw, set now in an unreadable mask. Yet he caught the girl's dark eyes and held them, and in that fleeting moment a glint of deep and hidden mirth twinkled in his own. Then it was gone at once.

Ellen Lockhart caught her breath and held his gaze until he turned abruptly from her.

"If you're a grub-liner," Jeff was demanding, "who have you worked for? And how'd you get away off up here? And what's this business of your sneakin' up to Silver Spring and getting yourself caught in one of my foreman's coyote traps? Huh? What about it?"

A slow smile came then on the lean face, lingering as the newcomer spoke.

"Lockhart," he said, "I am Ed Rhodes."

"You're—" Jeff broke off. The disbelief that he was about to utter died in his throat, for Jeff Lockhart was a man of various and strange experiences. As the saying goes, he had heard the owl hoot in many places. He was willing now to listen and perhaps be convinced.

"Explain," he said bluntly.

The gray eyes cast a look at the girl.

"My daughter," explained the ranchman. "If you have anything to say, say it. Her ears are the same as mine." He gave his white head a sharp nod. "Glad to know you, Rhodes, if you are Ed Rhodes. But if the Drovers' Association sent you up here as a range detective, what's this play about your being a grub-liner? And how come you to tangle with my foreman?"

The smile on the lean face faded. "You've got a tough one there, Lockhart, and his side partner, too. They make a team! I did pull off the desert trail to avoid meeting them. Had no idea they would get suspicious. Thought they were only some other drifters. Then that coyote trap—well, that was just a bad break for me.

"But now, I *am* a grub-liner—just a cowhand that's traveling along the meal route and hoping he can get a spring job. That's my game. Do you see? Only you and"—he looked at the girl, drew his eyes from her with effort, finished pointedly—"only you and your daughter are to know that I am anything else.

"Reason for that is plain, isn't it? Things have happened on this range, or you wouldn't have sent to the association for an outside man. I have some of the dope already. For one thing, you are taking care of a boy here named Artie Bell.



The boy's father was shot about a year ago, wasn't he? Because he rode too wide a circle and played detective himself.

"Whoever did it is going to be on the lookout, and things happening now might stop for a while if they knew that an association man had come in. I'm taking it for granted that you told no one your plan. Or maybe you did tell this Starr and Moore pair?"

"Not a solitary one," said Jeff. "Only me and my girl, Ellen, here, knows I sent a letter." He kicked out a chair. "Sit down, Rhodes. I guess you are Ed Rhodes, all right. I'm believing your word."

"Thanks," said Rhodes, easing himself down into the chair. "I'm glad to sit. I don't mind admitting that I got a whale of a beating down there at the spring!"

Jeff shrugged. "Don't hold it against Starr and old Hardpan. They had good reason." He backed to a bench along the side wall and sat down upon it. "There was a killing at Silver Spring just a week ago. That's when I wrote and sent for you. A buyer coming in to pick a bunch of early beef steers from my round-up was shot dead."

"And robbed," Ed Rhodes put in.

Lockhart's squint narrowed. "How did you know that?"

"Part of my business to know it. This buyer was robbed of five thousand dollars—real money. Banks being what they are these days, you didn't want a check of any sort. You had him bring cash."

Across the lamp glow the two men surveyed each other through a moment of silence; one grizzled, white-haired, an old warrior plainly questioning; the other a poker-face.

"What else do you know, young fellow?" Lockhart demanded.

Ed Rhodes grinned slowly. "Nothing, for the present."

"Then I'll tell you something. That money was all in bills, and all marked. They were large bills, too."

"Good," the younger man approved. "Good enough. Have any of them been circulated?"

"No."

"Have any of the regular dwellers around here, who might have known your deal, pulled out of the country since the killing?"

"No. That's what I've been watching for."

"Then whoever did it and stole the money," Ed Rhodes concluded, "are still on the mesa."

Boots clumped outside. Lockhart and the girl remained unmoved on the wall bench, but instantly Ed Rhodes shifted up onto his feet. His hand fell down along his right thigh. It reached the empty holster. He turned, his gray gaze questioning.

"Just Starr and Hardpan coming back," said Jeff. "I'll talk to them."

He reached around and opened the door, and the two pushed in.

Casually, Jeff said, "It's all right, George. I guess you just picked up a grub-liner. His yarn sounds good enough, so you might as well put him to work in the morning. Hasn't got his warbag, but you fix him up with a bunk and blankets."

"Yeah, sure," said the lank foreman. He turned hard, blue eyes slowly and looked the newcomer up and down.

"Name's Rhodes," Jeff Lockhart finished. "Been working down in the Casa Grande country. Take him along."

After the three went out, Ellen sprang up, still holding the stranger's gun.

"Dad!" she exclaimed. "Do you believe all that? Is he Ed Rhodes? And is he here to help us?"

"Well, now," said Jeff easily. "I could send out a letter and see. But I hate to spare a man to carry it in to town, and no one is going that way. Anyhow, it would take a couple of weeks to get an answer. Might as well hold this young ranny on the place and learn what he is."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE MULESHOE MEN



RUB-LINER, eh?"

Walking ahead in the dark, George Starr flung the question back over one lean shoulder. "What outfit you been ridin' for?"

Ed Rhodes hesitated in his answer. He was trailing just behind the foreman; at his rear came Hardpan Moore. He was wary of these two. Even the fact that they were Jeff Lockhart's top-hands was no guarantee.

Back in the front room of the ranch house Lockhart had seen fit to say the Casa Grande country.

"Old man Winters," Ed replied, "down below Casa Grande."

Starr said nothing. They clumped on in single file and reached the bunkhouse. Ed Rhodes was leading his horse, Skip. He turned off alone and put the animal in a corral.

When he came back to the bunkhouse door and entered, a dozen pairs of eyes gave him the onceover.

Starr's gruff voice flung out by way of a general introduction: "Meet Rhodes, here—Rhodes, this is the bunch. You'll know 'em all soon enough. Maybe too damn soon!" He grinned with his wide, toothless mouth.

Ed went into the bunkhouse.

He observed that apparently George Starr could keep his trap shut. That was one thing in his favor, anyway, for no one seemed to know what had happened earlier tonight down at Silver Spring. Most of the cowhands accepted him openly as a grub-liner who had found a job.

But as Ed passed the door and stopped in the long, narrow room, he was aware that, while others gave him an off-hand greeting of, "Howdy," or "Glad to know you, Rhodes," two remained fixed and silent, their figures hunched forward from a corner bunk.

"Cook has to roll out at three tomorrow morning," said Starr, at Ed's side, "so he's turned in. But I'll rustle you some grub." He went out and returned presently with a tin plate piled with biscuit, potatoes and slices of meat.

Spring nights were still cold, and a stove glowed in the middle of the room. A coffee pot steamed there. Starr jerked his chin at it, inviting, "Pour yourself some mud, Rhodes. Hey, you, kid," he told a boy on a bench nearby, "shove over and make way for a man!"

The boy grinned, moved over, and Ed sat down beside him. The usual noise of a ranch bunkhouse continued. Boots clumped about, men talked. Some wandered up, curious or friendly, gave their names, spoke a word to the newcomer and wandered off. They were all here—all those same names to be found anywhere in the West. There was a Blackie, a Frenchy; Doc, Whitey and Dutch. A Slim was here, too, and a Tex and Pecos Bill.

Shifting his quiet, gray eyes among the lot, Ed Rhodes sized them up. A hard-riding bunch of brush-poppers, all right.

"You're sure some hungry, ain't you?"

Ed swung about and looked at the boy beside him. A tanned, young face peered up, brown eyes crinkling in a grin.

"Why, hello there, Art Bell," Ed greeted him, taking a chance.

Brown eyes lost their laughter. "How'd you know my name?"

"Oh, that's easy, kid. You're pretty well known around this country."

The boy straightened up a little. He had yellow hair that curled in spite of being plastered with water. Slowly, he said, "Then I guess you know that my dad was shot about a year ago and I'm lookin' for the fellow who did it."

Ed remained silent, touched by a quick feeling of sympathy for the boy. Then came admiration for the straight man's way in which he had said, "I'm lookin' for the fellow who did it."

Thoughtfully, Ed put down his tin plate. How much did this boy know? With not too much curiosity, he asked, "You got any idea who did it, Art?"

"I ain't tellin'."

The boy's mouth clamped shut. But his brown eyes went down along the rows of double-deck bunks, traveling over the men who sat or sprawled in them, and Ed Rhodes, watching that slow, deadly serious gaze, caught himself feeling with certainty that Art Bell knew much and that in this room tonight was the one he suspected.

George Starr came in and dropped a blanket roll at Ed's feet. He stood, running his eyes along the bunks.

"There's an empty," he said, pointing, "over in the corner. Tell those two buzzards, Al Fanning and Dusty Ragan, to go roost on their own and quit muddyin' up that one."

Ed picked up the blankets. With the roll balanced over his shoulder, he tramped down to the last cot.

Even before he reached it he knew the two men were not going to move. It was the only one empty. They could see he was coming to take possession. But they sat fixed, their legs crossed up under them, their boots dropping flakes of dry mud on the mattress.

They stared up when Ed halted. He gave back the look, stood waiting, motionless, the bedroll still balanced across his right shoulder.

In the general talk tonight he had learned already which name belonged to which man. They were both big men, bony and tight-skinned, with sharp faces like mountain Apaches. Al Fanning was the black one. His hair was black; his sullen features were black and lowering. Even in clothes he ran to a black hat, vest and black breeches. A hard man to see on a dark night!

Dusty Ragan, crouched at Fanning's side, was gray, as if powdered over with the fog of Arizona's earth. Stubble on his face was that hue, and his round, hard eyes were like two gray marbles.

From the bunkhouse talk, Ed had gathered that they owned a small outfit, the Muleshoe brand, over west in Cliff House Canyon. It carried only a scattering of cows on winter range, and the two men were here representing themselves in the Flying Arrow's spring round-up.

He stood looking down at Fanning, for it was the black one who seemed the leader.

Fanning continued to glare up in a lowering, hostile silence. Then he spoke. "Sort of draggin' your picket rope, ain't you, grub-liner?" he drawled, his voice smooth and insolent. "You're a long ways from home. Come from the Casa Grande, did you? Well, how was she down around the old Casa this winter? Sort of dry, same as up here?"

Ed recognized a trouble-maker. Here was one. A wrong word and there would be a fight.

He'd had one battle this evening. His ribs ached where Starr and Hardpan had rolled him on the rock. Altogether it had been a large and long day. He had been fourteen hours on the Painted Desert. All he wanted now was to stretch his bones on this bunk and get the creaks out of them. Time enough later to fight, if Fanning pushed it.

So he said easily, "Yeah, it was dry down there. Drier this winter than I've ever seen it." And then instantly he knew he had been baited.

He had not been in the Casa Grande country for a year. It might have been dry or it might have been wet. He didn't know. But he saw now that Al Fanning did.

Out of the corner of his eye Al cast a look at Dusty Ragan. An understanding of some sort passed between the two men in that sly glance.

"Dry, was it? Huh! Say, what's your little game anyhow?"

Al uncrossed his legs from the bunk and let them hang over. At his side Dusty Ragan did the same. They sat with hard hands gripping the bunk edge. The room became immediately silent.

From back toward the center George Starr snapped, "You, Fanning, draw in your horns! You've been blowin' up trouble all evenin' and this crowd's had enough of your gab. That's Rhodes' bunk. Get out of it!"

"Sure," Fanning agreed. "Sure, it's his bunk. Why don't he take it?" He looked up. "Only I want to know what his little game is. Sayin' he comes from the Casa Grande, when—"

Ed dropped the blanket roll. As he took one step forward he said, "Yes, wise guy, I come from the Casa Grande." Every word crackled.

Al Fanning lunged up onto his feet. "And I say you're a liar!"

Benches and chairs crashed against the side walls as other cowboys slammed everything back to clear the floor. Feet stamped. Men swung up into bunks,

perched in rows. They had ringside seats. Someone yelled: "First round! Go to it, Casa Grande!" In the narrow, cleared space the two were already locked, struggling, ripping at each other in a cow-camp fight that knew no rules.

Ed Rhodes was not a hot-head. If he had have been, that first minute would have seen him floored and beaten; would have made him a whipped man in the eyes of these cowboys, and would have given Al Fanning a chance to go on and spread his talk. That talk was what Ed wanted to stop.

He had bluffed about being from the south, sure. But whatever Fanning knew, and had in his mind about that, had better go no further. Of all the gang here tonight, this black trouble-maker and his partner, Dusty Ragan, were going to prove dangerous, Ed realized, to the man-hunt which was his real job on this mesa ranch.

So knowledge that Fanning's challenge meant more than a fist fight, to be ended one way or another and forgotten, put cold calculation into Ed's every move. If he had rushed in and met the other's first lunge he would be down and out by now. His trail-stiff body wouldn't work that fast. He had to get limbered up.

Suddenly bending, he had clinched when Fanning rushed him. Now he was hanging on, letting the man wear himself down in a wild thrashing of blows that were too short to do great damage.

Then Fanning's arms dropped and shot around his waist. Ed felt the bulging muscles tighten in a bear's hug. One man's back was going to break.

Each stood with his chin thrust against the other's right shoulder, pushing backwards while his arms pulled in.

An awed rumble of voices swelled in the room. For the space of a breathless moment neither man seemed to move. Yet their necks bulged with straining, eyes of both showed their whites, as they breathed in long whistling gasps.

Suddenly Ed bent. At the same time he twisted, turned; Fanning's feet came off the floor. Ed continued to pivot and, falling, crashed down upon the other

man's hulk. They rolled, broke apart, leaped up. They traded blows. Ed's arms cracked in, while his fists struck with a lightning one-two punch, to the head and to the body. Fanning took them like an oak post and then he sprang.

He came with head down, butting. Ed reeled back. The walls swam, and a dizzy line of faces peered at him. Hearing a warning shout, he tried to sidestep, and only half made it. The butting head caught him on the thigh, glanced and thudded against the boards. And then the rumble of voices faded like a dying wind.

Again locked together, the two men struggled along the floor toward the hot stove. Someone kicked them away. They swung each other back to the end bunk. There Fanning got one hand down under Ed's chin and yanked up. It was a neck breaker. Ed let go, and as he shook himself sideways the clutching fingers slipped from his chin. He was upright now, squared to the tall black form.

He took one step, began one sure swing. Down in the dark, unseen, a boot reached out. Dusty Ragan was on the bunk at Ed's back. As Ed tripped, his blow swung wide, and the power of his own step forward carried him into a straight-arm jab from Fanning's iron fist.

His head rocked, and the room spun before his eyes. A second blow crashed against his jaw. Ed fell, sprawling, and pitched over onto his face. He dug an elbow into the floor and tried doggedly to rise. Fanning leaned over and struck again. No prize-ring rules here. But men perched on the bunks were grimly silent as the black man dropped with both knees in the newcomer's back and began to wipe up the floor with him.

Ed folded both arms up under his face. Then, with the last flood of strength, he rolled. Fanning grabbed and hung on, but Ed came up on top and twisted free.

"Look here, you!"

The bunkhouse door banged open. Old Jeff Lockhart stood there.

"Look here!" he bellowed. "If you boys don't turn in and shut up this racket you can start ridin' right now. You—there on the floor—get up!"

Groggily, Ed rose to his feet. Fanning rolled over and crawled up into a bunk. Jeff Lockhart took a step into the room.

Ed faced him. Jeff brought himself to a sharp halt.

"Well, by thunder, Rhodes—" he began.

Unblinking, Ed caught his eye. The ranchman stood for a moment, his gaze narrowing, then turned and pushed out the door.

Ed watched, and suddenly inside him something jumped. For in that glance he saw the other person who had waited beyond the opening. Ellen Lockhart gave him one look, level, searching, with a scowl behind it. Then Jeff reached her, and together they walked away.

Wordlessly, the cowhands began to turn in. Yet Ed was aware of looks cast at him with heightened interest. He unrolled his blankets on the empty bunk, pulled off his boots and breeches. Someone blew out the light, and only flickerings from cracks in the stove were left to dance about the long, narrow room.

Ed lay on his back, aching all over, too badly hammered to sleep or even move. Presently, over the edge of the bunk above him, there showed a shock of yellow hair. It came out a little farther, and a young face peered down, grinning.

"Oh, boy!" said Artie Bell's hoarse whisper. "Some fight!"

## CHAPTER FOUR

### UNDER SUSPICION

**E**D'S first thought, upon waking in the morning, was that he had to get back his gun. He had last seen it in Ellen Lockhart's hand, as she stood covering him there in the ranch house living room. It must be up at the house now.

He rolled from his bunk and began to pull on his clothes. Around him in the dark other men were doing the same. It was not yet daybreak.

The door opened, and Starr called, "Rhodes?"

"Yeah?" Ed answered.

"Outside," Starr ordered crisply.

"All right," was Ed's reply, and in a moment he went out.

Starr's dim figure moved along the corral posts.

"Will your black horse do for today's work?" he asked.

"Sure enough," said Ed. "He's good."

"Well, Artie's wranglin' the remuda. Go to him if you need a change."

Starr let down a pole of the corral gate. "I'm round-up captain here," he continued. "After breakfast I'll give you all your places in today's drag, and I figure to put you and Al Fanning on opposite sides of the valley."

Ed took a step nearer. "I thought maybe you'd feel called to do that. Figure again, will you, Starr? Do me a favor. When you start the circle see that I am next to Fanning and that partner of his, will you?"

The hard old head thrust forward. Even in the dark, Starr squinted. "You lookin' for trouble, huh?"

"No, they are," Ed answered. "I don't aim to sidestep."

Starr clumped off. "I'll see," he flung back. "Maybe I'll put you three in line. If you and those Muleshoe men are on the peck you might as well get it over with."

East, beyond the high mountains that rose snow-capped above the mesa, it suddenly was day. Through the sudden light the remuda thundered in from the pasture and poured toward the corrals. Artie Bell loped past, herding the stream of horses.

Ed went in among the milling lot, picked out his black Skipper, roped him, brought him to the saddle shed. All around were moving silent figures, untalkative before breakfast, getting ropes, throwing on saddles, washing at the windmill pump.

The cook's bell rang. Men went in to the table, helped themselves from the deep pans of eggs, bacon and biscuit, ate, drank their coffee, went out again.

Ed managed to be first in and first out. He walked away unwatched, moved into the cottonwood lane and approached the long, low ranch house. Jeff Lockhart would be up this early himself, to get the

round-up started off. Ed expected that.

The house was built in the Spanish manner, with a number of doors opening upon the wide front gallery. Ed was near the main one, where he had entered the living room last night. Another, farther along, swung back, the double screen parted, and Ellen Lockhart stepped out. She was shrugging into a leather jacket as she appeared. Her brown hair was curly and tousled from sleep. She stopped, startled, as her glance swept to where Ed was standing. Feminine instinct sent a hand up to push and pat her hair into place and she took the belt of her blue jeans in a notch. Then, hands in her pockets, she came on to where he waited.

"Well?"

"Good morning? I'd like to see your father a minute. Will you tell him?"

Ellen hesitated. She glanced off into the dawn. Plainly she was weighing something in her mind. Her dark eyes came back to Ed with trouble in them.

"Dad isn't here."

Ed waited. It was mighty early and a strange time for Jeff Lockhart to be off somewhere. He thought the girl would give a word of explanation, but Ellen said nothing.

"Then it's all right," he continued. "I can tell you what I came for. I'd like my gun."

"Oh!"

Ellen stepped to the living-room door. "I think I left it in the rack." She opened the screen and held it for him. Ed crossed the threshold and remained just inside while she went on to the fireplace end.

The whole house was of thick-walled adobe; a regular fortress going back to the days when Jeff Lockhart first came here and held this home place against Indians, Mexicans and the concentrated raids of rustlers.

The door-panel was flanked by a long, narrow loophole. Other loopholes pierced the wall near each window. Between the fireplace and one corner, and wider than the stone chimney itself, was a gun rack. It still held an arsenal of rifles and ammunition.

Though old, the guns were bright and oiled. They could talk if called upon.

Abruptly, Ed's wandering gaze stopped. Last night a great Colt forty-five had caught his eye. It had hung from a horn peg at the end of the mantelpiece—Jeff Lockhart's old trusty, he had thought then. It was not there now.

The girl seemed unable to find Ed's gun and was up on tiptoe, running her hand along a high shelf. She had tossed a match into the fireplace, upon kindling of juniper. Flame leaped up, throwing its glow and warmth out into the room, and Ed Rhodes, back against the door, took a long, slow breath, held it, slowly let it out. He blinked as if to flick away this picture.

Too long in his mind's eye he had been seeing a room like this; this sort of ranch house, and a girl. He had never quite visualized her. But now he knew that all along in his dreaming she must have been slim and brown and warm-cheeked, with dark, puzzling eyes.

It had been long since home meant much to him in reality, although he did remember one. But when he was still a boy he had seen it licked up by fire, his father shot, and knew that his mother had died later, because of that night's terror. It was a rustler's raid. The tragedy left a tall, quiet sort of kid out on his own with nothing. Ed Rhodes never forgot, and behind his grim vengeance later, against range trouble-makers, was that memory.

Yet Ed was a ranchman. He knew himself that all his work with the Drovers' Association, and all his hopes, had been toward a chance some day of having a home place again.

"How stupid of me!" Ellen turned to him with a little annoyed laugh. "I thought I put it right here!"

She was still standing on tiptoe, rummaging on top of the high shelf.

Ed went down the room to her. "Want me to look?"

No need for him to feel on the shelf, for he could see, peering over the girl's curly brown head. His gun was there, pushed back against the wall.

Ellen blinked at him, her eyes dancing. "It does pay to be a six-footer!"

"Sometimes," Ed agreed.

She retreated a step and stood near the fireplace. Ed dropped the gun in his holster, and when he reached down to tie the end thongs close around his leg he knew she was watching the act. Her gaze had sobered, and she was looking at him again with her direct pondering appraisal when he straightened up.

"When can I see your father?" he asked.

"I don't know."

He scowled slightly. It was necessary for him to talk to Lockhart. "Well," he insisted, "will he be out on the range today?"

She shook her head, unanswering.


Outside rumbled the hoofbeats of many horses. The cowboys were riding, and it was time for him to ride, too. He heard shouts. And the girl's eyes, fixed upon him, were saying that he ought to go. Still, she offered no information about her father.

"I'm here for more than a round-up, Miss Lockhart," he said plainly. "Remember that."

"Yes," she answered. "I'm sure of it!" And Ed, turning from her, wondered what kind of a double meaning was planted in those words.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### LAME COWS

LMOST at once, as he joined the round-up bunch and took off south over the mesa, he was aware of someone missing. The men were all together now, having not yet been split for the day's drag. They went at a lope, straight away from the home ranch, and Ed fell in line.

Abruptly, he knew who was not here; Hardpan Moore, George Starr's sidekick, had not reported. Ed scowled.

The foreman himself was up in the lead. Other familiar figures were strung out behind Starr, Artie Bell among them, and Al Fanning and Dusty Ragan riding long-legged, rangy bays. Good horses, Ed

saw, and fast. But Hardpan was absent.

Only the cook was left back there in the cowhands' quarters, and at the ranch house even Ellen had had a stocky little dun tied near her door. So everyone was out. Ed loped along, gathering a few facts in his mind and seeing if they might fit. There was Jeff Lockhart, gone at daybreak, or before. There was that old forty-five of Jeff's missing from its horn peg where it had hung last night. Now Hardpan was missing, too!

Any connection? Hardpan might have gone with Jeff—or behind him! Did Ellen know? He was sure that she knew something, but, not being certain of him, even perhaps feeling suspicious of him, she had told nothing.

Ed's scowl darkened his deep-set eyes. If there was some sort of game in the wind, he ought to be in on it. He would not get very far on this job until both Lockhart and Ellen trusted him completely.

For two hours the men loped on across the mesa, until the home ranch dwindled behind to a mere cluster of white dots in a patch of green, and the sun rose, and in its glare the mountains east and west hemming in this high table land, shrank back and took their proper places forty miles away.

Bunched, the cowboys leaped gullies, dodged through mesquite, scrambled into a dry wash and out again. At last Starr wheeled, throwing up his right hand.

They had come to a deep, sheer-walled gorge cutting squarely across the shelving mesa. From where Ed halted, the gash seemed to strike without an end, east and west from one mountain range to the other. It was a great natural check against cattle drifting further south.

Starr was calling off the men. Two dropped out. The others turned and rode west along the gorge rim. From time to time the foreman called more names, and by twos or singly men pulled in their horses and halted.

The bunch thinned. There were only half a dozen left, when Starr said, "All right, Rhodes."

Ed wheeled from the line. He drew



Skip to a stop, shifted in his saddle, leaned forward comfortably with arms crossed on the horn, and watched.

The little group proceeded a mile farther. There, two more riders held back, and, in the sharp sunlight upon bay horses, Ed knew that Fanning and Ragan were next to him in this day's drag.

He uncrossed his arms, picked up his reins and went to work.

The plan of the day's round-up was for the men, now strung at far apart intervals along the gorge rim, to start back toward the home ranch, combing the mesquite and gullies for cattle as they went. The men formed a dragnet, each one responsible for a mile or more of country on either hand.

This early in the spring Jeff Lockhart counted on his cattle being still low down and not up in the higher mountains. All he wanted to do now was sort out the winter strays and brand the early calves or those older ones that had been missed last year.

For a time the men went forward evenly, dust flags marking the wide-flung front of their progress. But soon, as cows jumped from cover and had to be chased and headed right, the line broke. Some of the dust clouds drifted in the lead; others hung back. It was still a dragnet that the men formed, but an uneven one, and with some holes.

Through the first hours of morning Ed had it easy. The section of mesa directly before him was barren of brush, level, cut only by shallow washes in which cattle were not hard to find. Angling back and forth across his allotted ground, he began to collect an ever-increasing band. They were steers mostly, and running straight ahead of him without attempting to turn back, these gave no trouble. He had time to look around.

He was in a country to warm a cowman's heart. His gaze drifted through the rich grass and out over the expanse of Jeff Lockhart's domain. He fell to wondering if a man might find other acres like this, perhaps farther on. But not too far! For Ed was day-dreaming now, and his dream was of a long, low

house, with a homelike living room, and somewhere in it a slim, warm-cheeked girl whose brown hair would be curly and tousled every morning when she woke up.

He forgot for a while that he was a man-hunter, and today was only a link in a chain of events that might jerk him out of this country at any minute.

Abruptly a herd of five animals that he had picked up turned and broke back. They cut away from the direction of the ranch house, curled their tails and leaped into the range cows' swift, galloping run. Ed clamped his knees. The horse under him had seen the break. Skip's ears flattened. He pivoted on bunched hoofs and flashed off without as much as a guiding word.

Ed circled these five and brought them into the main band again. Some calves were in his gathering now, and the mothers of these gave trouble. He worked on. Right and left other increasing herds made dark patches against the plain, all moving slowly up the wide shelving mesa.

About midmorning he saw a speck of a rider lope down the long sweep from the home ranch. Later he made it out as Ellen Lockhart, traveling at a slant west toward the far end of the dragnet. She vanished into a gulley and did not again appear.

A cowhand's round-up day is from dawn until whenever he finished work, with no stop for food for either man or beast. By afternoon the dragnet had gathered a rolling brown wave of cattle.

Ed was in mesquite now. He had come far to the west, close into territory being combed by Al Fanning and Dusty Ragan.

With sudden interest his glance halted and he rose a little on his stirrups.

During the day he had kept watch over here as much as possible, but had seen only the mass of cattle the Muleshoe men were gathering, with now and then a glimpse of the two riders themselves.

He was in a shallow ravine—the beginning of a wash that in time deepened and made a lateral cut down the wall of the mesa gorge. He could see its notch in the rimrock on south. Mesquite feath-



ered the bank above him on the west. Over that way Ed's interest had been caught. He waited. Then again from beyond the mesquite came the stumbling rattle of hoofs.

He continued to sit a little longer, motionless and listening. He had seen the main herd of those that Fanning and Ragan had collected, and they had been far from here. Was this a bunch breaking back? They had slipped out, maybe, unseen? Yet that Muleshoe pair were good cowhands, whatever else they might be. Any sizable bunch wouldn't get away from them—and, judging by that sound over the ridge, this was a sizable lot.

Then Ed's trained ears picked up another fact and gave it meaning. These animals were not on the run. Instead, by the rattle of their progress, they seemed to stop, move on sharply, slow down, move again. A man didn't need to have much savvy to know that this bunch was being driven!

Ed gave Skip pressure with his knee and rode out of the basin. At the mesquite he picked a place and went through with no crack of breaking branches. Abruptly in front of him was a gulley deeper than the one he had come out of and thick with brush, save on its gravel bottom.

Cattle were moving down it. A small lot. Fifteen, Ed counted. He stared. All cows!

His gray eyes took on their calm calculation beneath slightly narrowed lids and he sat for a moment watching the herd. Close upon his first discovery that these were all cows, with no steers in the bunch, no calves following them, came another. Every animal of the whole fifteen was lame!

They limped, some on tender forefeet, some lifting their hind hoofs and letting them down gingerly.

Upon the last in line, whose flanks were visible, he saw Jeff Lockhart's up-pointing Flying Arrow brand. He compared ear-marks of the others. The whole lot belonged on the Flying Arrow ranch, yet here they were, heading away from it, and Ed still had the hunch that they

were being driven. No rider was in sight now. But a man might easily be in the mesquite, urging them along, though he himself kept under cover.

For half an hour Ed remained hidden in his spot on the ridge. Below, the cattle wandered on a short way and halted. They did not start again. In half an hour they had begun to graze a little.

Ed picked up his reins. No use wasting more time. He'd have a look.

The cows bunched and jumped into a run as he came down the gulley bank. He circled and turned them again upward. Riding in behind the last one, he spread his loop, dropped it and caught her forelegs. She went over. Skip braced back and held a tight rope. Ed swung off and walked up to see what was making this animal lame.

He found out in a glance. Her hoofs had been pared on the bottoms, down to the tender part. No wonder she stepped gingerly! The same thing had happened to the others.

Ed stood up, shoved his hands into his pockets and looked about. So—someone wanted to keep these cows from the round-up. Al Fanning and Dusty Ragan were combing this territory. Then they were the ones who had sorted this bunch of lame animals from the drift and had sent them back.

He bent his head and squinted at the cow. "And where, old lady," he asked, "is the calf you must have had not long ago? Huh?"

A grim satisfaction came over him. A trail began here, all right. Tomorrow, at the calf-branding. . . .

He had stooped to slacken the rope a little from the cow's legs. With the instant of his moving a rifle cracked, a shot zinged past his arm. He dropped flat, close against the protecting heap of the animal. The gunfire had come from the mesquite on the west bank.

Even before he moved again another shot followed. It thudded dully. The cow shuddered, kicked, seemed to collapse. In a moment she lay still, dead.

Tense, brittle silence came then. It lasted for many minutes. Ed crouched

with his gun drawn. He slipped it up over the animal's carcass. His eye rose and shifted along the mesquite. Nothing showed. He tested matters by letting his hat crown rise two inches. Nothing happened. He stood boldly upright.

A clatter at his back pivoted him, and he knew then why that other man had faded. Ellen Lockhart was loping down the draw.

She brought her horse to a wheeling halt, swung off and came forward in quick, ground-thumping strides. Her hat was jerked down against the slanting sun, she had been riding in dust, and the red bandanna hung loped below her chin, and with a gun in her belt she looked to Ed like an angry little bandit.

Her dark eyes blazed. "What's this? What have you done? Oh!" She jerked back from the dead animal.

Not until then did Ed realize what a guilty picture he made. There had been shots. Ellen had heard them. And now here he stood with a six-shooter in his hand. At his feet lay this. It was all too plain. He had done the killing!

Ironical humor of it made him grin. When he wanted to bring this girl over on his side he was only making her more suspicious. He laughed.

If Ellen Lockhart's eyes had blazed at first they snapped fire at that.

"Yon can laugh?" she demanded. "Stand there grinning? Ed Rhodes!" Fury choked her. She gasped, gave up trying to talk and spun around to her horse. She flung herself up into the saddle and was gone before Ed could speak.

Yet he would not call her back. There was nothing he wanted to explain. Perhaps tomorrow, after he had watched the calf-branding, but not now.

It was a trying day. At ten, when Ed went on night guard, he had much to think about. The herd lay quiet, down in a thousand heaps that dotted a wide pool on the starlit plain below the ranch corals. He sat bent forward in his saddle, at ease, with long arms crossed on the horn.

He thought of the lame cows and the calf-branding tomorrow. Al Fanning and

Dusty Ragan brought a concentrated scowl over his eyes. Hardpan Moore had not showed up tonight; and Jeff Lockhart was still absent. Ed reached up into his shirt pockets for tobacco and then rolled a smoke. He looked out across the peace of a moonlit mesa; peaceful now, but murder had happened here, one man killed, another killed and robbed. He speculated on the whereabouts of that five thousand dollars.

These things Ed considered with cool detachment. They were his job. But in time his thoughts turned and his coolness vanished. A lamp had bloomed in a certain window of the ranch house. He sat watching its soft yellow patch and he was thinking of two dark eyes and a warm, dusky face. He watched until the lamp went out. When at last he rode on, slowly making his circle, it was with a feeling that tonight he guarded a sleeping girl.

## CHAPTER SIX

### A TRAIL BEGINS

**I**N the branding next day, Ed looked for sleepers. If yesterday's lame cows meant what he thought they did, then this morning's cut would show a number of calves with earmarks, but no brands. When these sleepers turned up he wanted to see whose iron went on them.

Cutting from the herd began at six. The cattle had been standing since day-break, moving slowly in a great brown pool. Cowboys riding at the edges of the pool held it in check. Over the plain hung a rising mist of dust, and out across the mesa went the echoing organ roll of a thousand animal voices.

A hundred feet from one side of the herd George Starr built a hot fire between two rocks. Near him lay a row of irons—the heavy stamp brands of ranches represented in this cut.

He arranged his woodpile. The fire filled the morning air with sharp juniper smoke, clean smelling and fragrant. He patted down the coals to make his fire hotter. Satisfied, he stood up.

"All right, boys," his gruff voice called. "Drag 'em in!"

Half a dozen cowhands rode leisurely into the herd, and their range horses, wise to the work, continued to press through the close-packed cattle, unhurried, frightening none. In the tight mass brands low on the flanks or sides could not be seen but by the notches cropped in a cow's alert ears each rep picked the animals belonging to his ranch. And if a cow had a calf, that scared baby would be stuck to her tighter than a postage stamp.

In a moment a cowboy came out, riding with great indifference, his rope stretched behind him from the saddle horn, and on the other end of the rope a calf sliding along on its belly.

Behind the calf came its anxious mother, head down, complaining about this business with short bellows. The rider stopped near the fire. Two bulldoggers pounced on the calf, flipped it over on one side, threw off the rope from its hind legs.

"Hot iron!" yelled one. "Marker!"

A man ran from the fire carrying the stamp of this particular cow's brand. The stamp was pressed on; then a mark made in the calf's ear. It was all over in a moment, the animal leaped up, ran to its mother and together they walked off.

Over and over again this was repeated as other hands brought out their calves. Occasionally no mother followed from the herd, but the calf would have an ear-notch, and was given the corresponding brand. These were sleepers. It did not happen often, and no Flying Arrows were among them.

Once, kneeling over one of these, George Starr grumbled: "Seems like you fellows would get yourselves a flunky to carry around an iron when you're range ridin'! Sure is a lazy man who only nicks a calf in the ear and won't take time to brand 'im. Betcha I'd fire the first Fly-in' Arrow man I caught doin' things shiftless that away!"

Ed cut for awhile, then rode out and changed places with a cowboy holding herd. He wanted to watch.

He could see the black-hatted form of Al Fanning and the shorter, gray one of Dusty Ragan moving among the animals. They passed back and forth, bringing their few stray cows and calves as they picked them from this drive.

Circulating casually around the herd edge, Ed managed to be near the branding fire several times when one or the other of the Muleshoe men came out with a calf. Two calves were followed by their mothers. Then came one that was alone. Ed saw that its ears had the Muleshoe swallow-tail notch, and it was given the Muleshoe brand.

He drifted on—and again was passing when Al Fanning dragged out a small one. It, too, was a sleeper. Twice more he repeated that round. Then he was satisfied.

By noon the cut had been made. Reps declared none of their strays were left in the Flying Arrow herd.

George Starr threw up his arms. "Grub time, boys! Go and eat it!"

Ed held back until Starr was alone, picking up his irons. Then he rode over and stopped near the foreman.

"Pretty good clean-up," he said by way of an opener.

"Yeah," Starr answered. "We run through 'em easy enough here. Got a good bunch of boys."

"Seems to me there was quite a bunch of sleepers," Ed commented. "Take that Fanning and Ragan outfit. How many did the Muleshoe get?"

Starr straightened up from the pile of branding irons and wiped his hands by drawing them up along his breeches. He reached into his shirt pocket for the tally book.

"I don't know as it's any of your business, Rhodes," he said, "but I'll see." He flipped back a page of the book. "I credited the Muleshoe with eleven of those sleepered calves."

"Eleven," Ed mused aloud. "Sort of a slack way to work a ranch, I'd call it."

"Yeah," Starr agreed, "it is slack. I never let any of my men get away with sleeperin', I tell 'em when they get their rope on a calf they better ear-mark 'im

and brand 'im, too, even if they have to pack wood a mile to build a fire. But Fanning and Ragan, they're just plumb no-account!"

Ed leaned on his horn. "Is that all?" he asked.

Starr flashed a look up at him. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Ed, "that where I come from men don't make sleepers. Not any more. Most of them who did are in jail."

The foreman nodded. "I know. It's the way more than one coyote has got himself a herd." His old eyes narrowed and were suddenly sharp and keen. "So that's your hunch, is it, Rhodes? About Fanning and Ragan?" He paused. Then: "Say, Rhodes, are you a range dick?"

Ed grinned a little. "Yes, I'm a dick. But keep that under your hair. All right?"

"Sure," Starr agreed readily. "Sure thing!"

On his way in to the cook house Ed passed the small corral where the Muleshoe cattle were being held. He stopped and peered over the top rail. Almost at once Al Fanning rode around from the opposite side and confronted him.

"Something you want, Casa Grande?" Fanning snapped. "Huh? Anything here you're lookin' for? Then, if there ain't, maybe you'd better travel!"

He sat crouched forward in his saddle, his black, hard-boned face glowering and hostile. Weapons were plentiful about him. He had a six-gun of some sort in a belt holster. But along with that he had continued a frontier trick of carrying another holster strapped on the right side of his saddle horn. It had an open top; the gun butt sticking out of there was never more than a few inches from the man's fingers.

Ed had taken his look into the corral—all he wanted. He could ride on now, certain that among the eleven calves there in Fanning's bunch of "strays," some, or all, had been stolen from those lame Flying Arrow cows. But Fanning's bluster was getting too open. Time now to see whether the Muleshoe man was bad or a lot of bluff. Ed pushed up close, and his

own fist was not far from the six-gun that lay along his right thigh in quick and easy reach.

"Suppose I'm not ready to travel?" he asked, his voice close-bitten. "Then what?"

The other's lower lip came out savagely. Jaws bulged. Through a moment Ed waited.

Fanning's jaw relaxed. "Smart one, ain't you?" he sneered. "Know lots of things, huh?"

"Sure," said Ed. "I've been to night school. Dark nights. Learning all the time."

"Yeah?" Fanning jerked his horse. He wheeled. "Then you'll learn just about one thing more, Casa Grande!" he flung back. "I'm tellin' you that!"

"Good," Ed called after him. "See you later." And as he rode on he knew that George Starr was not the only man who suspected his real purpose in riding this range. . . .

A trail was clear in his mind now; at least a beginning. It was true, he had learned things. He ought to talk to Jeff Lockhart. Yet, through that afternoon, the ranchman did not appear.

At seven o'clock in the evening, washed, slicked up a little more than usual, Ed approached the ranch house.

In the thick blackness of the cottonwood lane he almost bumped into Artie Bell. The boy peered up close with his set, serious face. Ed's swift eye saw that Art's right hand was in his jacket pocket and that the pocket bulged with a gun.

"Why, hello there, Art!" he exclaimed. "Out giving the old legs a stretch?"

"Oh, hello," the boy answered. "It's you, is it?"

"Fact!" Ed laughed. "It's me." He walked on, but at a short distance, quickly looking back, he saw Art still standing motionless in the lane.

Ahead of him, windows of the living room made warm, flickering patches. All other front rooms of the house were dark. He crossed the gallery and knocked. A Mexican woman opened the door. She had on a white apron over a black dress and carried a tray as if she had just

served a meal. Beyond her, sitting at a small table near the fireplace, was Ellen.

Before Ed spoke, she called: "It's all right, Annie." She rose, turning to him and smiling. "Come in, Ed." Then, at once to the woman: "Bring another cup, will you, Annie?"

Friendliness filled the room; the friendliness of fire, of warmth and of the girl's voice and movements. She pushed an easy chair near the table—Jeff's chair, with tall padded back, wooden armrests that had been variously nicked and whittled, and a stretched cowhide seat.

"Sit down. I'm glad to see you. My father hasn't come back yet, and I'm eating in here by the fire like this just to keep myself company."

That was not all she had done. She had transformed herself completely tonight. Instead of the boyish, young person in boots and belted blue jeans, she was all feminine, a beautiful girl in a dress of soft buttercup gold, like those flowers that spring up after a desert rain.

Tonight she was princess of the Flying Arrow! It struck Ed like that. And coming in with matter-of-fact speeches to be made about work and calves and trouble, he found himself silent and wordless. Out on the range he could meet her and talk. But not here like this. He only wanted to look at her. What was there to say?

Ellen helped him. Her easy flow of talk bridged the first minutes. Then he found himself leaning back in Jeff Lockhart's armchair, with the girl seated again, opposite, and the Mexican woman bringing in an extra cup of coffee.

The woman was large and motherly and hovered over Ellen at the table. But, putting the cup full in front of Ed, she looked at him with her sharp, black eyes, measured him; looked at the girl. Wisdom was in her fine, old face. Whatever she decided, though, about these two people, showed not at all in the unchanging lines of her expression. In a moment, she went out.

"There," said Ellen. She poured her own coffee, picked up a spoon and stirred it. "Now, what was it you came for?"

Slowly, Ed grinned. "I've clean forgot! You can't expect to treat an old brush popper this way and have him keep his right mind."

Her smile rippled into a little chuckle. "Well, try to remember. You don't seem so out of place. Perhaps it had something to do with the ranch."

Then at once she sobered. Through all the tone of her light talk there had been a note of worry.

Ed, too, dropped his pretense. This was business, serious business. He drank his coffee and put down the cup.

"Ellen, I've got to see your father. Where is he? And when will he be back?"

She shook her head, and the firelight made bronze flecks in her soft, brown hair.

"I can't tell you."

"You mean you won't tell me?"

"No, not that. I mustn't tell you where Dad went. He wanted it kept secret himself. And I can't tell you when he will be back. I wish I could! I expected him before this and I am worried."

Ed dropped his gaze and studied the scuffed toes of his boots. When he looked up, suddenly, he found her dark eyes fixed upon him, her face deep in the mystery of some thought that he wished he might read. Nor did she turn from his straight glance.

Her voice came quietly. She was leaning a little forward, her arms on the table top. "Ed, I wish I could tell you . . . everything."

Everything! The word hung in the following silence. All their speech tonight seemed filled with double meaning. He wished he, too, might tell this girl everything.

He hauled himself out of it with effort. A man could wreck his good life on dreams! Better wreck them first. He had only drifted into this place. After a few days, or weeks, he would have to drift out, on his way.

But he knew with a sudden pang of loneliness that his way from now on would never be the same. He was a ranchman. These two days had brought

it all back, to get up in the morning, clear your eyes to a far-flung mesa range, feel the deep joy of work to be done—that was what he wanted. That, and—

He looked at the girl. Her eyes had turned from him to the fire. A soft flush lay upon her tanned cheek. His urge was to go to her, try to tell her. Yes, and make a fool of himself here and now!

So, deliberately, he said: "If I can't talk to your father, you will have to answer some questions."

Ellen relaxed. She faced him. "Yes, of course. What did you want to ask?"

"Mainly things about Fanning and Ragan, those Muleshoe men."

She gave a start, with a little lift of her shoulder, but said only: "Well?"

"Those two," Ed stated, "have been rustling Flying Arrow calves. I have that much on them now; it may lead to more. Yesterday you heard some shots and then found me hunched over one of your cows. That looked bad, all right, but I didn't kill it. Fifteen animals were being herded down the wash. And all of them were lame. That's why I roped one, to find out. Then those shots you heard—they were for me."

Ellen's lips parted. Ed went on. "It's like this—fifteen lame cows in that bunch, then today's cut gave Fanning and Ragan eleven motherless sleepers. Do you see? Not very long ago they took those calves away somewhere and lamed the mothers so they couldn't follow. They put their own swallow-tail in the calves' ears. In today's branding all those calves were stamped with the Muleshoe. Fair enough! Now they are legally Muleshoe animals."

"Well!" Softly, Ellen let out the word. "I've heard of— How long, Ed—"

"No telling," he put in, "how long Fanning and Ragan have been playing this little game. Probably quite a while, starting in a small way and keeping well under cover. Now they're getting mighty bold. One thing leads to another."

"If we go back far enough we may find out why Artie's father was killed and who did it. Then when an outlaw gets away with his first jobs he begins to count himself a big man and looks

about for big things. Like that buyer who came in here and was murdered and robbed last week at Silver Spring."

Ed shrugged. "There's my report, so far."

Tensely, Ellen was studying her clasped hands. She did not look up. "What are you going to do next?"

"Trail Fanning and Ragan," Ed answered, "when they pull out of here with their bunch of strays."

"No!" With the abruptness of shock, Ellen leaped to her feet. She came around the table. Ed met her, standing. She clutched his arm.

"No!" she gasped again. "Promise me you will not go until my father comes back. If Fanning and Ragan leave, you can trail them later. Promise me!"

"But why?" His hand found hers.

Swiftly, she returned the grasp, holding to his hard palm. "Because— Because something might have happened to Dad! Oh! I don't believe it! But there is that chance. You've got to stay here. I might need you terribly!"


She pivoted from him, turned to the fireplace and stood leaning against the rock front.

When Ed took a step toward her she stopped him. "No. Please go now. But do you promise?"

Through a long minute of silence he considered many things. At last he answered: "Yes, it's a promise. I'll not leave you here alone."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### GRAY DAWN

 OR two days the round-up continued south of the home ranch. Starr was combing that section of the mesa first, before swinging on to the north.

Strays from other ranges would be more likely to have come in from the southeast and southwest, particularly these winter drifters. All north was Flying Arrow country, even up and beyond the high mountains. Reps would not need to watch the cattle brought in from there, and most of them would be leaving.

Dusty Ragan was the first to pull out. Al Fanning stayed behind. But Ragan, taking the bunch of calves and few cows they had cut from the first drive, herded them off west across the mesa.

This was next day after Ed had looked the lot over in the corrals and Fanning had come snarling up to him. He wondered if there was any connection. He'd like to trail Ragan. Yet Fanning was the more important. So he could wait. And last night he had promised Ellen.

But midafternoon of the second day Fanning, too, vanished. Melted. Dropped out of sight. The morning's drive had been short. Cowhands were back at the holding ground early. In the cut there were no Muleshoe cows. One moment Fanning had been riding around the edge of the main herd, and Ed, keeping an eye on him, was cutting out Flying Arrow calves.

The next moment, it seemed, as Ed returned from a trip to the branding fire and looked about, the black figure on a rangy bay was gone. Ed knew he might have been several minutes there at the fire. The calf had struggled and the rope had not been cast off at once. Yet how could a man and horse drop away like that?

The work was at full rush, and he had to go on with it. Cows were milling in a high wind that slashed across the mesa top. Dust fogged about them. Heads were up. They were ready to break and all hands were needed.

He continued cutting out. Black storm clouds rolled in behind the wind. Afternoon sunlight turned to a sickly gray. In it the cattle bawled, shifted their close-packed mass, blocked the cutting, and that short day's work dragged through until nightfall.

It was not until after dark that Ed, without stopping to eat, loped passed the bunkhouse, into the cottonwood lane and on to look for Ellen.

He did not have to look far. As he swung off at the house, dropping his reins, Ellen ran down from the gallery steps.

She came to him. Her voice shook.

Anguish welled in her dark eyes. "Ed! Ed! I was starting to get you. Something—something has happened!"

A grip of her two hands upon his arm drew him near. It was impulsive, natural, a girl's desperate turning to a man for protection. Ed moved. Her trembling body was close; and as impulsive and natural was his sudden sweep of both arms around her.

Storm wind howled about them, and they stood together in a moment of understanding, her head tight against his shoulder, his cheek pressed to her hair. She quieted, and then the bond between them, made so close by her desperate fear, was gone. Her head rose; she drew away from him.

Ed spoke. "Ellen. What has happened?"

"It's Dad." She managed her voice evenly now, in stern control of herself. "Dad has not come back. Nor Hardpan. I've heard nothing from them, and they—"

"Wait," Ed broke in. "Go back some. I don't know yet where your father has gone. And I only guessed that Hardpan went with him. Now start at the beginning—I've got to know where and why."

"They went to Cliff House Canyon. That's Fanning and Ragan country. They went to look at the Muleshoe camp."

"Exactly when did they go?" Ed urged. "And what are they looking for?"

She bit her lip, swallowed once, looked up imploringly. "Oh, don't wait! It may be too late even now! Get—" Nerves too long at high tension shook her body as if in chill.

Once more Ed's arm was around her waist. He held her.

"Honey girl," he said gently, "now look here. She's a tough old world sometimes, and things do happen. That's a fact. But shucks! Your dad's too wary and too experienced a customer to let any kind of trouble slip up and bite him in the neck! And if it should happen, on a long chance, his hard, old hide would save him! There. That's better. Now."

Ellen had turned her face to look at him. She was smiling a little. "You're



right," she agreed. "Dad has been through it all before. I mustn't worry." She let herself out of his arm. "It's like this.

"That same day you came here I picked up some tracks leading from Silver Spring. We have all hunted for some clue to whoever killed the buyer there and robbed him of that money. These tracks I found seemed to have been made about that time, a week ago. And they were made by horses that had been hidden in some brush back from the Spring—and, well, it all looked suspicious.

"They led toward Cliff House Canyon. Three horses, then only two horses. I looked around and found the third one. It had been shot. And near it the earth had been dug up, about the size of a man's grave. The other two tracks went on toward Cliff House Canyon, and by that time I was sure Al Fanning and Dusty Ragan had made them."

Ed was smiling down at her in the dark. "You ought to have my job, Ellen!"

She continued. "I told all this to Dad that night you came here. I had just got in from my ride. Dad went right down to the bunkhouse and got Hardpan. Because, with Fanning and Ragan here for the round-up, it would be a good time to go over into Cliff House Canyon and look through their camp. No one else would be there.

"So Dad and Hardpan went—" Fear crept into her voice again.

"Yes," Ed finished for her, "and they haven't come back. They just wanted to look around some more. Wouldn't that be it?"

"No. Dad said two days at the most. And it's been three!"

"All right." Ed was turning from her, gathering up his reins. "I'll travel. Give me directions."

She, too, had faced about. From the dark she answered, "Later. I've had Artie bring up my horse. I'm going with you."

As he mounted, she appeared on her dun, with saddle bags in place, a slicker roll behind her seat. Ed's gaze swept over her, once, taking her all in—a game little tracker with a pistol in her belt!

It was some time past midnight when

Ed first knew they were being followed.

Twice, earlier, he had dropped back a little, letting Ellen go on. He had held Skip to a slow walk those times and had listened, while in his ears remained faint, uncertain echoes that might have been from hoof-flung rock. There, on the open mesa, the storm wind had whipped about him, moaning in distant draws and rattling a hail of gravel in nearby mesquite. He had made out nothing then.

But now he had come to the first sharply crooked canyons of redrock mountains. Here ridges curved the wind overhead. The bottoms were sheltered. He heard behind him the unmistakable ring of a horse's shoe.

Ellen caught it. She pulled over close to Ed's knee. They stopped. Came her quick whisper, "What was that?"

Ed was deftly tying his rein ends around his saddle horn.

"We're being followed," he answered. "Don't worry. I'll stay back. Now, look." He slipped to the ground and stood near her stirrup. "You ride on. I'm letting my horse trail behind you. Understand? It will sound as if we are both pushing ahead."

"But—" she began.

"We can't wait too long!" he urged. "That rider will be on us any minute. You've got to do as I say. Don't turn back at all, unless you hear three even shots. Scattered ones don't count. There may be some shooting. I'll put three in the air when you are to turn around."

He stepped back and thumped Skipper with a closed fist. The horses moved on. Ed took another backward step and stood leaning against a boulder.

He could see nothing, not even his own boots. Clouds blanketed the sky, and the burned cinder rock of this canyon gave no relief to the blackness. He might be down a well with the top on.

The rider broke through like a patch of the black itself, moving almost without sound. The horse's hoofs brought only a swishing whisper from the wash-sand. Ed let the formless lump come abreast, let it pass one more step.

Without shifting from the boulder, he



shot, holding his gun high, torch-fashion, and aiming up.

Its roar blasted the night. The pitch dark was shattered by the red flame, and for an instant all objects about his leaped into vivid outline.

Ed's close-bitten voice snapped: "Stop, there! Watch your hands! Put them—Well—Kid!"

The figure caught in the gun's red flare was Artie Bell.

Ed took a step. "What in thunder!"

The boy had halted. He called down, "Don't shoot! That you, Ed Rhodes?"

"Yes," Ed advanced and snapped up a little angrily, "What's the matter with you, Art? What's the idea? Boy, don't you know you might get plugged dead center, pulling a stunt like this?" But then he gave a short laugh. "It's all right, Art. No harm done. Now don't jump. These are not for you." He put three shots in the air.

Ellen came back at a lope, Ed's horse following.

Ed struck a match, cupping it and holding it so Ellen could see the boy's face.

"What in the world, Artie!" she cried.

"Your dad," said Art, with grave determination, "told me to watch out for you. So I have, every night. Right there in the cottonwoods. Last evening when I saw you pull out I did, too. I figure that's what your dad meant."

"Boy," Ed told him warmly. "You're all right!"

"Okay, then," said Art. "But that shot—Christmas!"

Ed turned to get Skip. "What will we do with the Kid?" he asked Ellen in a low voice.

"Take him along. We might need him." Louder, she said, "Artie, we are going into Cliff House Canyon. Do you want to come with us?"

"Do I! Say! Let's go!"

Daybreak they were through the first red hills. A mesa shelf lay ahead, stretching for perhaps two miles in width, then the steep rise of a high mountain wall. It was wild country. The mountains were barren, straight-ribbed, with vertical can-

yons. Yet one canyon mouth, opening low upon the mesa shelf, seemed to slash through the whole range in a gorge made by some ancient river.

Toward that Ellen gave a wave of her hand. She was riding close on Ed's left. "Cliff House Canyon," she told him. "It begins there and goes back forever. I've never been beyond that mouth."

She shuddered; then smiled a little. "That's what it does to me!"

He said nothing, but rode with his gaze fixed on the black maw. It looked like the devil's hole, all right. He didn't blame the girl for shivering. No one would ever expect a cow camp in there. No cowhand would ever make one in there, either!

Presently his eyes shifted over the mesa that still must be crossed. In the light of dawn nothing was clear, no one object was set apart from another, all brush and rock blending into a gray sea.

Yet morning came swiftly, and the sea dissolved. Mesquite rose out of it, then clumps of rabbit grass and barrel cactus. Far off a queer-shaped rock broke through, grotesquely in the form of a fallen horse.

Day brightened a little more. Over the mesa shelf the three figures advanced. And then Ed's Skipper, ears suddenly arrested and flung forward, recognized the queer object first. It was no contortion of the dawn, but a real animal, plunged into a heap, with its neck bent under its body.

Ed saw it. Then Ellen and Artie. All saw, too, the flat form sprawled nearby.

They broke from line and raced across. It was Ellen who hurled herself down ahead of the others and ran, stumbling, and dropped onto her knees.

Ed followed afoot. Artie remained with the horses. The may lying sprawled on the ground was Jeff Lockhart.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE TRAIL FORKS



EFF was not dead.

Over him Ellen was crying: "Dad! Dad!"

He moved. His white hair shifted and

his face turned. Blue eyes opened. One arm was crooked up under his head, and he lay on his side taking a long breath.

"Ellen?"

His voice was all right; weak, but with the old warrior's full tone.

"Ellen? Is there any water near?"

"Yes, Dad!" She sprang up and ran to her saddle bags.

Ed bent over the man, hunching down onto his heels in a casual cowboy movement, his words calming and matter-of-fact. "How are you, Jeff? What do you want to lie down out here for?"

The flicker of a smile went over the pain-shot eyes. "How are you, Ed? I'm all right. Glad to see you. I can talk in a minute."

Ellen came back with a metal water bottle.

Ed stood up and looked around. His first glance had taken in the details. Even before bending over Lockhart he had seen the six-gun lying near the old man's arm. And he had seen Lockhart's scratched head and the ripped shoulders of his shirt, as if he had been dragged through brush.

Now he saw that the horse had dropped here from a bullet fired at close range. The hole showed just back of the right foreleg.

Shifting his gaze back to Lockhart, he picked up something else.

The ranchman's right boot heel was missing and the boot foot showed scars of having been caught through the stirrup. It looked like a case of a loose heel, and the man accidentally jamming his foot down too hard, maybe when the horse got frightened and bucked with him. Then he went over, hanging by one leg, and it was just some sort of luck that he didn't get killed. That's the way it all looked. But was that true?

Lockhart was sitting up now, with the girl's arm around him.

Ed turned to Artie Bell. "Pile off, kid, and build us a twig fire, no smoke. There's some coffee in my roll and a can to boil it in."

The boy sprang down, eager to be useful.

Ed continued to stay back out of the picture for a moment, letting Ellen and her father talk. But when Art brought up a can full of steaming black coffee he took it from the boy and went over to Jeff.

"Get around some of this," he invited.

Lockhart hooked his fist over the rim and drank.

Ellen smiled up at Ed. "No bones broken."

"Nothin' the matter at all!" said Jeff with vigor. He put down the can, emptied. "Now I'll talk." But he was not so much recovered as he wanted to pretend.

Ed offered, "We might get at the things I want quicker, if I just ask a few questions. I shouldn't lose any time."

"Guess you shouldn't," Jeff agreed. "All right."

Ed sat upon his heels. "Where is Hardpan Moore?"

Lines of the old ranchman's face hardened. He was all at once savage. "Dead," he answered. "Ragan killed him—back there." He waved into the maw of Cliff House Canyon. "Ragan came first, night before last. We didn't expect him that soon. Thought he'd be held on the round-up. Then Fanning came last night.

"Hardpan and I had found something, and we were still in the Muleshoe camp, looking everywhere trying to follow this thing up. About dark, evening before last, Hardpan was standing guard down the canyon aways. I don't know how Ragan ever got to him. There wasn't a shot.

"Next I knew, Ragan was on top of me. I thought it was Hardpan coming along. Ragan was scared of what he'd done. I could see that. He left me tied in ropes and waited until Fanning came, which was late last night, or maybe toward morning. Nothing much is clear from then on, only this—"

Jeff jerked a hand at the horse. "This business was Fanning's idea. You can know that. They knocked me out, then put me on the horse with my boot shoved through the stirrup, took me out to the mesa here and started me off. Left everything natural to make it look like an accident. Even left the gun in my holster,

and that's the only reason I wasn't dragged and killed like they wanted." Lockhart sat for a moment, silent.

Ed turned to Artie. "Take the bridle off my horse and lead him around where he can get a little grass, will you?"

"I came to," Lockhart was finishing, "when I went over and hung from the saddle. Horse wasn't so scared right off and I hauled myself up a bit and tried to stop him. Kept away from his hoofs. But he started in then, plumb crazy. I got at my gun and shot him and then you came along." With grim eyes he held his gaze fixed upon the black mouth of Cliff House Canyon.

"Fanning and Ragan built a big fire a ways below their camp. They covered up what had happened to Hardpan by burning his body and they figured I'd be found dead in an accident. Then by now they've put a lot of this country behind their backs."

"Well, yes," Ed halfway agreed. "But if they think they've covered up what happened, why pull out?"

"Taking the money."

"That five thousand dollars? You know they've got it?"

Jeff nodded. He groped around his cartridge belt, found a brass forty-five shell and pushed it from the loop. He took the shell and pulled off the lead. A tight green roll was stuffed inside. He picked it out, unrolled it and smoothed it on his leg. It was a fifty-dollar bill.

"Marked," said Jeff. "You'll find three pin holes in the top left corner. We found this the first day, cached in a box of other shells in Fanning's warbag. He must have taken this small bill out of the roll, hoping to get it changed some time. The others were mostly in hundreds or bigger. The rest of that money, Ed, was somewhere in camp, or near it. I'd swear so. And that's why we stayed."

"No sign of it?"

"Not any."

Ed stood up. "All right, Art," he called. The boy started in with his horse. Ed looked down at the ranchman. "Can you make it on home," he asked, "with Ellen and Artie helping?"

"Don't figure about me," Lockhart answered quickly. "You get onto the tracks of that pair! I'll make it home. You ought to have some men. I'll send George and—"

"No," Ed put in. "I'll go it alone."

He turned to the tall, set-faced boy. "Now look here, Art, you've got a job. It's up to you to get these two home. Jeff will ride your horse. I'm putting them in your hands. Do you see?"

"They'll get there," said Art. "You can count on that. But I wanted to go along with you. I've got my reason."

"You mean Fanning?"

"Yes. I knew he was a killer, even if I couldn't prove it. When your show-down comes with him, you just mention something about me, will you?"

"Art," Ed promised, "I sure will!" He walked on to his horse, passed around to the far side, and as he stood tightening cinch straps, Ellen came to him.

Quiet voiced, she said only: "You've got to go, I know that. But you've got to come back, too!"

Ed lowered his arms. Then his hands went out to hers.

"Ellen," he asked, "do you mean it matters—that way?"

"Yes, Ed," she answered. "It does."

They parted there on the mesa shelf, Ed riding west into Cliff House Canyon, the other three turning back east through the red rock hills to the ranch house in Hidden Springs Valley. And Artie Bell was as good as his word. He got Jeff Lockhart through.

In the days that followed, Jeff showed the iron strength of body that the range had given him. He sat in his easy chair on the front gallery, watching the work and directing it. Yet he was watching mostly the goings and comings of his girl. They gave him much to think about.

He saw that each day she rode with the round-up crew, but vanished every evening and came back after sunset from one direction out of the west. She cheered him when they were together. Still he knew the silence of her room when she was in there alone. In time he understood.

On the third evening he drew her to the arm of his chair as she passed.

"He'll be back, honey girl."

Ellen looked startled. Then she laughed. "Dad, you do too much thinking, sitting here like this." She patted his head.

"Fact," Jeff admitted. "I do. But he'll be back, honey. Don't fret too much."

"He's got to come back!"

Jeff looked up quickly at that tone of her voice. It was desperate. He held her two hands in his hard one. "Ellen, girl, does it mean that much?" he asked.

Again she answered him as she had Ed Rhodes. "Yes, Dad, it does. It means—everything."

## CHAPTER NINE

### TRACKS

**E**D trailed on west. In the Mule-shoe camp he stopped only long enough to pick up tracks that would identify these two men; things peculiar to Fanning and Ragan and no others. Not alone the tracks of their horses. But individual signs.

Every man does certain things in certain characteristic ways. These ways may be small and escape the unpracticed eye. But in the manner of making camp, building a fire, cooking his meals, he can leave a mark as plain as his written name.

At the camp in Cliff House Canyon, where the two had made their hangout in the rock-walled rooms of some ancient dwelling, Ed poked around for half an hour and got acquainted with how these men did things.

It was a shiftless outfit. The gear they left behind showed a long time of drunken, indolent living. They had slept in the cubelike rooms of the cliff house. Out in front on the canyon floor they had cooked. For all the length of time they had been here, no fireplace had been built. There was only a black pile of ashes with a deep hole in the middle where they had taken out a dutch oven.

Their animals' tracks showed two saddle horses and a pack mule. These Ed followed.

On up the canyon he came to a narrow side-wash with a fence of juniper poles strung across the mouth. He approached and looked over it. A bunch of calves were penned in there without water or feed—the strays cut from Jeff Lockhart's round-up.

The animals would die. But what did Fanning and Ragan care now. Their sleeping game had been cut short; but they were clearing out with five thousand in cash. Ed dropped the gate poles and left them open. Then he pushed on, keeping Skip at an untiring pace, settling himself for a trail whose length could not yet be told.

In his favor was the fact that he traveled light, while those two ahead must gauge themselves to a pack mule. Against him, perhaps, was his being alone. Two pairs of eyes and hands against one.

He followed tracks that day until they faded beneath him in the dark. Then he slept beside them, spreading his saddle pad and lying upon it, covering himself with his one blanket and slicker.

Before noon next morning he found where Fanning and Ragan had made their first trail camp. And here was a real sign, along with a curious piece of information. The men had come up the winding course of Cliff House Canyon, keeping in the rock bottom as it climbed, looped, rose toward a gap and at last struck through a deep saddle of the mountain range.

Here on the ridge was a thick growth of pine, plenty of pitch wood for a hot cooking fire. But the coals and burned ends that Ed found were of quaking asp, carried from a distance. These two were Indian-wise, using this fuel that was almost smokeless. And in the white ash-pile was again the deep hole where they had done their cooking in a dutch oven.

Ed gazed down upon it, leaning low out of his saddle. Must be mighty sure of themselves! Mighty sure of their getaway, to stop for an all-night camp like this. He could see where they had put down their bed rolls. And then to feed out of a dutch oven—did they figure they had plenty of time? For all they knew,

Jeff Lockhart was dead and had never talked, of course. Or perhaps the string of good luck in these crooked jobs of theirs had made them boldly confident and unwise. Men get that way.

Ed Rhodes rode on.

West beyond the range top, the mountains turned green, with timbered slopes and park meadows spotted along wide valleys. Water flowed from high springs, formed small streams, then a river, and the men ahead began to do tricks with their trail.

They doubled back, riding in the shallow river flow. Ed had to travel both banks up and down to find where the two horses and a mule had splashed up onto earth again. On a course due west, they led onto a long tongue of hard volcanic rock that showed no hoof-scars, and upon that they made a loop due south. But in this turn Ed out-guessed them and so saved himself some time.

Going west again down the mountain shelf, the men had ridden among a bunch of range horses, scattering them, and had left a dozen trails for him to choose from. Six of the trails were steel shod. He picked up Fanning's and Ragan's only by finding the small, narrow print of the mule, following that, discovering in time where the two men had cut in to collect their pack animal.

Three days, two nights. . . .

"Hold it, Skip!"

Reins drawn tight, Ed sat motionless, bent a little forward, peering hard. The horse jerked for a slack bit.

"You!" said Ed sharply. He reached along the black neck and gripped a handful of mane. His voice quieted. "Easy, boy, easy. There now."

The animal was tired, he knew that. Well, he wasn't so fresh himself. These days had been no pleasure jaunt. But at this moment, sitting fixed, eyes searching down a short slope ahead, he knew his trail was ended now—almost. How to bring about the exact end was what held him rigid on the spot.

He had come down west out of the mountains. Around him lay the first low sand hills of a desert sink.

Tracks of the men he wanted were plain here, and fresh, not many minutes old. For on topping the ridge upon which he now waited, he had seen the riders and the mule melt over one beyond. They were perhaps three-quarters of a mile ahead. He had thought they were farther. This catching up had been sudden. The question was, did they know he had seen them? That was hard to tell. Then had they seen him?

They had.

Sunset was in his face. The ridge ahead was knife-edged against the colored sky, and as he watched, a slowly rising hat crown broke the sharp, black line, remained a moment no higher than it would take for a man's eyes to peer over, then vanished. Someone had crawled up there and made sure of him.

His gaze shifted. Farther along the ridge, maybe fifty feet, was another small, round swelling of the black line. It remained. It could be a heap of sand, or a stone—or a second hat with a pair of eyes beneath.

Ed moved his horse a little. If that second knob was in fact a man, he apparently intended to stay there and watch.

Ed halted again. Two to one. That's the way the game lay now. He sat a moment. Then: "Skipper, old boy," he announced into the twitching black ears, "suppose we camp. Huh? This is going to be our night!"

Off on his left was a hole in the hills with the dark patch of a spring. He pulled over towards it, went down into the hollow, swung off at the pool. It was a small basin rimmed with salt grass and had about enough water for one horse.

Standing, Ed pushed back his hat and swept a slow, thoughtful gaze once around the bank that completely hemmed him in. On the west a single feathery clump of mesquite rose against the skyline. All the rest was as smooth as the rim of a bowl. He was satisfied.

He turned back to Skipper and unsaddled. Then he spread the pad and unrolled his blanket. His camp was made.

It was almost dark now. Later there would be a moon. Ed sat on the blanket,

pulling off his boots; and as he looked about, this small pool in a barren hollow seemed strangely like one other. That one, back there—ages ago, it seemed—was the beginning of a trail. This was the end. And how much there had been between!

He was thinking of Ellen Lockhart, and it was not the first time that her words came again in their tense, quiet pleading: "You've got to come back!"

## CHAPTER TEN

### HOME RANCH

**I**N the first faint silver of the rising moon two dark forms moved up the gray hill, approached the thick feathering of a mesquite clump and stopped. They stood close together. Their voices whispered.

"Here?"

"Yeah. I watched him. . . . There he is now! I'll do it."

"No. Wait a minute. Better be sure. That bozo's tricky."

"Do you figure he saw us?"

"This don't look like it."

They stood squinting down upon the moonlit camp.

A horse dozed there, making a black, formless heap in the grass. The man's bed was plainer. His boots stuck out from under one end of the blanket.

"Say!"

The boots had moved. They drew up beneath the blanket a little.

"Nail him! Don't let him wake up!"

A rifle rose and pointed in the night.

Flame exploded. Down in the camp bed the boots gave one jerk and were still. But lever action of the rifle clicked sharply and a second shot crashed. Three more in rapid succession went tearing into the blanketed figure.

One man grunted. Together they turned—and suddenly froze.

Ed Rhodes was standing at the far end of the mesquite clump, half crouched in the feathery branches, his pistol leveled. He was bootless.

"Watch it!" his clipped voice snapped. "Put 'em up! High! Quick!"

The figure with empty hands started to obey. But the one with the rifle swung it, shot from the level of his hip. Lead bit through the mesquite.

Twice in the same instant of that rifle flash, Ed fired, aiming low. The man went down as if his legs had been cut from under him. He pitched forward on his face and lay groaning. Ed counted him out of the deal. Yet the other had had a chance to draw. All at once the mesquite came alive with hornets.

Five ripped through, too high, for the man was firing where Ed's gun flare had been. Ed had dropped. He was low in the brush and on the down-side of the slope. He answered. And then the sixth shot came from above, dead aim for his spurt of red fire.

The gun flew out of his hand. His fingers went numb where an instant before they had been clamped hard about cold metal. Hot pain was in the rest of his right arm. It hung club-like at his side.

He leaped up, driven by knowledge that the other man's weapon was empty. There had been six shots. Give him no time to reload! Ed plunged around the mesquite. The man was running, reaching for shells in his belt as he stumbled on.

Ten steps down the hill Ed was upon him like a panther, riding his back. It was Al Fanning.

They pitched on headfirst, plowed a furrow in the sand and rolled, locked together, clawing for grips. Ed had only his good left hand to battle with, but he was thrashing with his heavy right arm. Fanning fought to break and bring his gun into play. Ed knew then that he must have had time while running to put at least one shell in the chamber.

Salt dust of the desert rose in the moonlight. They choked in it; and in it were half blind.

Once before, back there in the bunkhouse that night, Ed had struggled with a killer in his arms. Yet Fanning was a trapped animal now, fighting like a fiend, and his body was a barrel of mad strength. He gouged upward with his

knees. He sank his teeth into Ed's shoulder. Butted with his head. Blood came. With all brute strength he was trying to jerk his gun hand free from the leg hold that Ed had upon it.

Ed clamped long, lean legs with the hardness of a steel vise. But even that pressure could not last. If only he could use his right hand for something more than a hammer. He jabbed toward Fanning's throat. Still his fingers felt nothing. Couldn't tell if they were open or closed.

Minutes dragged—hours they seemed, of straining in that grim tug of war, arms locked, legs clamped, backs bent to the limit of pull.

Slowly Fanning was getting his gun hand free. The knotted fist slipped a little, jerked, drew the weapon Ed was clamping on it alone. He could feel the revolver's hammer cutting through his flesh. Fanning jerked again. All his last remaining effort was centered on that.

The gun came out suddenly, and as suddenly Ed grabbed down with his left hand, closed about the muzzle and pushed it away from his body. It exploded in the sand. Fanning tried to strike with it. But Ed had shot a knee up. He got it against Fanning's shoulder. He flung himself over on top of the man. That knee crushed down and at the same time his whole weight went onto Fanning's gun arm.

Something gave way. The man screamed, and the arm lay bent awkwardly back with fingers set stiff and claw-like. The shoulder was dislocated. At once Ed reached down, yanked. The arm was again in place, but Fanning continued to grovel in the sand, cursing.

Ed stood over him. "Get up!"

Fanning groaned.

Ed jabbed the revolver into his ribs. "Get up!" He coughed salt dust from his throat as he spoke. Savagely he drove the gun muzzle into the man's ribs. Fanning yelled and struggled up onto his feet.

He made a lunge. Ed stopped him with a thrust of the gun. "Other way!" he ordered. "Now walk!" He stepped in behind the black bulk. They climbed up.

Ragan was still where he had fallen below the mesquite, lying there knotted and nursing his legs. But he straightened and grabbed the rifle at sound of foot-falls.

Shielded behind Fanning, Ed clipped: "Talk to him!"

"Don't!" Fanning called hoarsely. "Let that gun alone!"

"Throw it away," Ed put in. "That's right. You!" he told Fanning, "stand there with your hands up. Turn your back!"

The man obeyed. Ed peered at Ragan. "What's the matter with you now?"

"My leg!" Ragan groaned.

"Broken?"

"I don't know."

"Well, get up and see!" Ed helped him with a jerk on his shirt collar.

Ragan stood gingerly, wavered, took a step.

"Shucks!" said Ed with disgust. "You're only punctured. Go ahead and walk. You too, Fanning. March!"

Passing the mesquite where he had first crouched, Ed dug up a rope end with his foot and followed down its buried length to the basin camp. The other end was attached to his boots. Under the blanket, bunches of salt grass made the form of a sleeping man.

Fanning and Ragan stared. Ed grinned.

"One of those things," he told Fanning, "that I learned at night school!"

He put a loop of his rope about the two men and tied them with only slack enough so they could walk. He threw on his saddle. Asking nothing, he started out of the hollow, driving the pair in the direction of their own camp. . . .

The money was not there. For an hour Ed searched, tore up the camp, went through everything. It was not on either of the men. He slit open their belts, jerked their boots off. Five thousand dollars would make quite a roll if kept all together. They might have scattered it.

He went through the pack bags, emptied cans, slashed a saddle-pad to ribbons. Then he dumped everything in a heap and went through the stuff once more. He had to have that money!



On a rock not far from him Al Fanning and Dusty Ragan sat and watched with jeering grins. He knew the working of their minds. They would serve a jail sentence, no matter what, before they would tell where the money was hidden. Then they themselves would come for it.

He went over to the two men. Ragan had one leg stretched out straight. Ed had put iodine on the bullet hole. He had given his own injured right hand the same treatment and some of the feeling had come back.

"Where's that money?" he snapped.

Fanning's lip curled. "You want it, smart guy. Sure. You find it!"

Ed swung away from him and stood off, his eyes prodding again through the camp stuff. There had been no tracks leading away into the rocks. The money was not cached in the sand. It was here—he knew—somewhere in the junk these men carried.

But he had looked through everything big enough to hold even a dollar bill! There wasn't— Say! Ed jerked to attention. All along this trail he had been following camp sites marked by ashes with a hole where a dutch oven had rested. Where was that dutch oven now?

Until this moment he had gone about his search doggedly. But excitement kindled and leaped in him. Find the oven!

He made a dive for the black patch where these two had made last night's fire. The patch was as unsuspicious looking as a man could want. It was the usual cooking place. But as Ed went down on his knees, there flashed to him its real purpose. This campfire was built over ground that had been dug into! Each night they had done this, covering a cache, playing safe at every stop.

Ed thrust his hand in the ashes. They were hot. A shovel lay nearby. He grabbed it up, dug down. The iron dutch oven was not close to the surface, as it should be if meat or biscuits were baking. It was deep—on in the earth. He struck the top. His shovel hooked into the handle. He lifted. The heavy oven came out.

Ed squatted on his heels, pushed off the cover, found a baking powder can inside, opened that. The roll was there.

"Come on, you," he said. "Let's ride!"

SHE was waiting as motionless as a statue carved of brown sandstone. Far across the mesa top Ed saw her, farther than he could know by any familiar detail that it was Ellen. The low-slanting sun dimmed the earth around her. It began to blot away the little figure itself. He pushed his horse up and quickened the pace of the other two. They came up again onto the square mesa top.

Ellen waited until the three approached. She let the first two pass as if unseen. Then she drew in close to the last one and rode beside him unspeaking. Mist of joy was in her dark eyes and her lips were parted, yet the meaning of this moment choked back all words.

Ed put out his hand to her, drew her even closer. Their knees touched and they rode on, still silent.

But some time later Jeff Lockhart saw them coming up along the cottonwood lane. They were not so speechless then. From his gallery chair he had seen the two prisoners come in, and George Starr had come up to say the job was done. The men were being held down in the bunkhouse under guard.

Ed Rhodes and Ellen had not appeared until just now. They came on slowly, the dim evening light melting their two figures into one. Or were they—

Jeff squinted. Yes, they were! He sat back. It was not his business to watch two lovers kiss. He looked around elsewhere. Soon they would come and tell him—and it would be all right. And he was glad.

He gazed out over the fading mesa, sweeping his blue eyes far along the miles of his ranch domain. Six months more—less than that now. But he was strangely content. This would go on—

He faced front. Ed and Ellen, still as one figure in the dimness of the night, were coming toward him up the gallery steps.

*(The End.)*



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## THE FAKIR'S

## BASKET TRICK



**ILLUSION:** A boy is bound and thrust into a small basket. Seizing a sword the fakir plunges it into the basket. He jumps up and down as proof that the basket is empty! The boy then steps out of the basket, unhurt.

**EXPLANATION:** The nimble assistant curls around the side of the basket for the sword-and-jumping act. He guides the sword past himself and into the opposite wall of the basket.

SOURCE: "Illustrated Magic" by Ottokar Fischer, translated and edited by J. B. Mussey and Fulton Oursler, The Macmillan Company, New York.

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## IT'S FUN TO BE FOOLED ...IT'S MORE FUN TO KNOW

One of the nimblest tricks of cigarette advertising is the illusion that "Heat Treatment" confers mysterious virtues upon a cigarette.

**EXPLANATION:** All cigarette manufacturers use heat treatment. It is a routine process of manufacture. Harsh, raw, inferior tobaccos require considerably more intensive treatment than choice, ripe tobaccos.

But neither the heat treatment nor any other treatment can take the place of good tobacco.

It is a fact, well known by leaf tobacco experts, that Camels are made from finer, MORE EXPENSIVE tobaccos than any other popular brand

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